

Tendering the Impossible: The *Work* of Irony
in the Late Novels of Don DeLillo.

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Illustrations:

Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel. *The Triumph of Death*
c. 1562. Panel 117 x 162 cm.
The Prado, Madrid.

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Abstract

The following thesis represents an attempt to account for the novelist Don DeLillo's last three novels (*Underworld* (1999), *The Body Artist* (2001), and *Cosmopolis* (2003)) through the examination of what I conceive as DeLillo's philosophy of language. It is my assertion that the crucial and articulating aspect of DeLillo's philosophy of language is his investment in, and investigation of, irony. As I argue, DeLillo's novels presume a certain conjugation of what I refer to as the *work* of irony (the seemingly impossible *work* of tendering both the allegorical imperative of naming *and* the ironic imperative of Otherness) with the work of art. In other words, DeLillo's theory of language reveals his theory of art and, thus, his own theory of writing. This aesthetic philosophy becomes the critical tool with which DeLillo evaluates the various symbolic economies of a culture and its individuals caught within late capitalism.

The impossibility of defining irony becomes, for DeLillo, a metaphor by which to understand language itself as what I refer to as a fallen and tender economy, constituted by an Otherness, which language can only tender. In his novels, DeLillo, I argue, suggests that language and subjectivity ought to be conceived of as forms of a faith in an Otherness, impossible to represent as such, to which all speech, violence, art, commodity and reproduction are indebted, and which we may mourn and represent – as we must – more or less faithfully, more or less blindly, and, by virtue of irony, more or less tenderly. The possibilities of faith and the ethical in art and representation, thus, for DeLillo, arise through an attention to an Otherness that can only be tendered through the very tenderness (fallenness, profanity, weakness) of allegory and language. To understand this is to understand the role of irony in DeLillo's philosophy, and also to understand DeLillo's profound commitment to language, his renovation of allegory through its mortification by irony and, thus, its remembering and mourning of Otherness. In this regard, DeLillo shares much with the melancholia of deconstruction as evinced within the language philosophies of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, in particular, Derrida's economic consideration, *différance*, and his notion of the *work* of mourning, both of which, I argue, offer the reader of DeLillo's texts ways of tendering the *work* of irony.

Acknowledgements

As, I imagine, is the case with most endeavours such as this, I too, as author of this text, owe a debt to privilege that I, with this document, am unable to articulate or discharge. This is not the place to elaborate specifically on the various aspects of such privilege, except, however, to make mention of all those who have, throughout the years, shown interest, given encouragement, or, merely been patient with me: first among these others are Cheryl and Peter, my parents, and then, Patrick, of course, as well as Aaron, Allan, Andrew, Brendan, Catherine, Christian, Christina, Creon, Dan, Howard, Jason, Jennifer, Jed, Kate, Kelly, Kev, Margaret, Mark, Matt, Mike, Phil, Rääli, Ray, and Rusty. Thank you all.

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Introduction

(i) Language

Sitting in her empty house, meditating on time itself, Lauren, the artist of DeLillo's *The Body Artist*¹ discovers her lover, a recent suicide, announced to her again and again throughout memory, and in the figure of Tuttle, a spectral figure she discovers in her home, through whom she is bared to announcements of Otherness. Thinking of Tuttle Lauren considers the following:

There has to be an imaginary point, a nonplace where language intersects with our perceptions of time and space, and he [Tuttle] is a stranger at this crossing, without words or bearings [...] He violates the limits of the human. (*TBA*, 99)

Lauren achieves the *work* of the artist and the ironist in this text precisely because she faces up to the impossible and ironic demand posed by DeLillo as the essential experience of full human consciousness: firstly, an imagining of the “nonplace” of irony, the ‘intersection’ of language with “time and space”, but secondly, an imagining of an Otherness in violation of this intersection, an Otherness that, for the artist, reveals the tenderness of the “human” in revealing the limitations of one’s language. Imagining the tenderness of one’s allegories, the contingent nature of one’s words where they intersect with the world is, essentially, a prerequisite for all DeLillo’s artist figures. I should add too, that such an awareness is necessary also to the sort of constellation of concerns and writers I make in this thesis under the rubric of what I see as DeLillo’s investigation of aesthetics, his theory of language and the *work* of art.

The emphasis on tender limitation brings with it a certain Kantian currency, particularly that reflex to the sublime where one’s cognition of the limits of representation is seen as proof of the possibility of imagining something Other, something beyond the known, beyond one’s imagining. The ghosting of religious awe is appropriate here, as in all DeLillo’s novels that investigate language for the possibility of the revelation – keyed to irony – of what one of DeLillo’s characters calls “the fallen wonder of the world”.² Chief among such “wonders” for DeLillo is,

¹Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist*. New York: Scribner, 2001.

²Don DeLillo, *The Names*. London: Picador, 1999. p.339.

of course, language – what I refer to as allegory.³ In effect DeLillo's texts perform a re-evaluation of language, a cherishing of the tenderness of allegory, and, with this, the fallenness of human subjectivity. DeLillo's texts take as their focus that which lies, like some underworld, in excess of language and subjectivity, a sacred Otherness, often contextualised as memory, that can be thought of as the impossible condition, beyond representation, from which the human possibilities of representation come. My argument is that through investigation of the limitations of subjectivity, conducted via a philosophy of language, an aesthetic philosophy, DeLillo, in a way that suggests much in common with the likes of Derrida, de Man, and Benjamin, articulates ethical and faith-oriented concerns through what I call the *work* of art. It is my argument that central to this project, and therefore central to DeLillo's work, is irony, conceived of as the articulation of an impossible but all-pervasive Otherness that reveals, by virtue of its articulating force, the tenderness of being human, the tenderness of language and art, suggesting in the process how acts of cultural production might continue in integrity and good faith in a world dominated by the modes of reproduction definitive of late capitalism.

The Body Artist, as the critic Philip Nel writes, “offers a lyrical meditation on language, memory, and the modernist (and romantic) project of bridging the gap between word and world”.⁴ What this “gap” or aporia means, how it is interpreted, or whether we interpret this division more as a question of delay or difference, reveals, I argue, how irony is interpreted and applied, as much by DeLillo's critics and commentators as by writers on irony and deconstruction. What I think needs to be pointed out is that Nel's suggestion, that DeLillo attempts to “bridge the gap” in *The Body Artist*, is inaccurate, and that this inaccuracy reveals not only a particular failing in the criticism of DeLillo's novels, but also, and perhaps as a consequence of this, a particular failure to recognise the vital and thoroughgoing importance of irony in DeLillo's texts. This misprision of irony in the critical work on DeLillo's novels leads, I argue, to a further impoverishment seen in the paucity of readings that observe and associate DeLillo's philosophy of language with the exigencies derived from

³ Richard Wolin describes allegory as a word for the condition of human subjectivity after the fall, a name for the condition that we occupy, the profane “world of knowledge, where the original, divine relation between things and their proper meanings – their names – has been sundered” (Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths: Explorations in the Critical History of Ideas*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. p.70).

⁴ See Philip Nel's article “Don DeLillo's Return to Form: The Modernist Poetics of *The Body Artist*”. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol 43, No.4. Winter 2002. p.736.

faith-based and ethical concerns. It is my argument that this sort of constellation of assumptions and concerns culminates in a theory of the *work* of art that from the moment of articulation stems from DeLillo's engagement with what I define as irony.

To return to the Nel quotation: we might well concur that, yes, the 'gap' is important to DeLillo in this particular novel, but not to the purpose of achieving some connection between word and world, but rather, to highlight the 'gap' as a way of investigating the relationship between word and world – how, as Lauren considers it, we make things (Others, phenomena, the world etc.) “seem” like something else. *The Body Artist* is, then, a novel about allegory, but allegory produced in the context of irony. Were we to cast DeLillo as a theorist or philosopher of language (like Derrida, Benjamin, or de Man) I would suggest that the goal of his inquiry would not be this gap or aporia, but merely the medium of it. The 'goal' of his enquiry – and this is the significant feature of my own engagement with irony – is what such irony avails, calls forth, and how the aporia it articulates is treated, regarded, how it is tendered by language users, and, thus, how it helps define and describe the “limits of the human”.

DeLillo's novels have always presented variations on the sort of “intersection” or crossing I have begun with, where a character must consider the application of word or name to the experience or perception of something Other. Such translations, as I shall continue to argue, reveal in DeLillo's texts the relationship of subjectivity to irony and Otherness. It is not surprising, then, to find Nick Shay in *Underworld*⁵ at a similar crossroads of language and Otherness (this time figured as the “unknowability” of God) to Lauren, searching for some pure word “alive with naked intent” (296), an “edging into darkness, into the secret of god” (*U*, 297). Nick is looking for a word to capture the “unmadeness”, the “negation”, that is the force of the Other, the force installed in the 'trope' of irony. Shay's desire to name the unnameable, to penetrate and contain this Otherness through language, is definitive of the sort of absence of a 'theory' of irony that helps delineate in DeLillo's novels the helpless from the imaginative, the faithless from the faithful, the consumer from the artist.⁶ Such a 'theory' of irony, productive of such distinctions is, in effect, observed by Curtis Yehnert in the following quotation in which, usefully, he also expresses

⁵ Don DeLillo, *Underworld*. Picador: London. 1999.

⁶ Of course, for the purposes of illustration I am being deliberately simplistic here; one only has to consider the motif of maturation that complicates Nick's relationship to irony in *Underworld* to see how different positions, faithful, venal, imaginative etc. mix within the subject.

some of the presiding assumptions I suggest DeLillo holds to in the writing of his texts. As Yehnert says, DeLillo

[...] shares with the more traditional postmodernists the conviction that language gives form to both self and world; in doing so it reflects not so much a picture of reality as the force of our impulse to make sense of our experience by investing it with coherence, symmetry, and closure that is imaginary, a fiction. He differs from those postmodernists in his particular focus on this paradox: Forms mediate and falsify, yet forms provide meaning and coherence. Language screens us from but also connects us to the world of real things. [...] DeLillo's major characters long for the pure, transparent Word, for the language that would give them immediacy, return them to themselves, which they imagine as simple and whole. That desire is impossible to satisfy because of the nature of language and of the self: there is no pure, original Word, which would "need no other sound" for meaning (*End Zone*, 89), Gary Harkness discovers instead that words suggest meaning only through a system of difference. Longing to get beyond words, Bucky Wunderlick resorts finally to silence, until he begins to understand the paradox of language's mediation: though it precludes the absolute true, still it opens a space for invention; it prevents direct knowing but provides for individual interpretation; it denies immediacy but offers a connection (flawed as it is) to others and to the world.⁷

What Yehnert singles out as the "paradox" DeLillo's texts "focus" on is what I refer to as the ironic consciousness – again, an attention to that gap between word and world that, as Yehnert construes it, itself becomes the place of "invention", "interpretation" and "connection (flawed as it is) to others and to the world". Essentially, what Yehnert discusses here is the paradox of irony, which is to say, irony conceived of as the following impossible articulation: on the one hand, "mediation" and representation, the word or allegory or name, on the other hand, the ironic force that differs and denies, that "precludes the absolute true", the undermining force that exposes all knowledge as better or worse "fictions" and falsifications. Irony is crucial because it can be said to articulate both the radical nature of Otherness, as well as the necessity of the fall into language, into allegory. Irony offers us a way of thinking of the intersection of profane words with the sacred and impossible Other. The politics, ethics, faith-related issues consequent to such a vision of irony are, I suggest, what DeLillo explores in his late novels, through his philosophy of language; they are the substratum to the case his texts make for the *work of art*.

As Yehnert indicates, while language may 'come' from the world, the Other, language never contains this Otherness. Like the subject who must use language and whose experience of being is defined by their being-in-language, all allegories of the world are separated from the world, both different and deferred from the world. As

⁷ Curtis A. Yehnert, "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo". *Critique*, Vol. 42, no.4, Summer 2001. p. 362.

such, however, language can be said to be entirely adequate to our experience of the world, but must always be seen as “fallen”. The crime and greater violence, DeLillo implies in his novels, lies in the misprision of this fallenness, and the systematic misprision of the actual and ironic nature of allegory. Such a consideration of allegory and its misprision is chiefly the ‘subject matter’ of DeLillo’s *Underworld*, but in order to understand this we have to understand the relationship of irony and allegory. Failure to recognise this fallenness is, I suggest, commensurate with the failure to recognise the ironic nature of our being subjects, and, primarily, this failure manifests in DeLillo’s novels as the dissembling or occlusion of the radical nature of our allegoricity. That is to say, without the ironist’s vision (DeLillo’s vision) allegory itself is devalued. Without the sense of allegory’s fallenness, and what comes from this, the articulation of something beyond itself, something Other, is lost, and language itself becomes impoverished as a consequence. In the promulgation – through what we could call ‘bad faith’ misprision – of the myth of allegory’s self-sufficiency (the assumption of its settlement of irony’s aporia), allegory, thus conceived, ceases to demand of the allegorist any further imagining, any greater inquiry, any demand for responsibility or competence. Through irony, that which mortifies allegory, ruining its façade in the name of all that remains in excess of its ‘meaning’, allegory itself is seen anew, is cherished, given the possibility of a further ‘turn’ in the widening gyre of context, signification and referentiality. It is the ironist’s vision that enables one, such as DeLillo, to view language (allegory) as our fallen wonder.

(ii) Irony and Allegory

The impossibly perfect, that is, the linguistically innocent, book (already a contradiction) devoted to irony would be one without categories - and perhaps without that first, inherited taint, agent, and category, the word irony itself. This, I hasten to add is not that book.⁸

This thesis too is not *about* irony, but rather takes as one of its principal themes the epistemological tenderness we are exposed to in our attempts to reckon with irony. Such a reckoning is, I propose, the way of mapping the intercourse with Otherness committed to by DeLillo in his novels. Considered in general terms one’s experience of irony can be said to be an experience that focuses for the subject (or artwork)

⁸ Alan Wilde. *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (1981). p. 8

through language or form, an incoherence, gap, or aporia⁹, a point of non-coincidence *à la* the experience of interruption (usually termed parabasis or anacoluthon in theories of irony). In this aporia an articulation of something Other to the subject, Other to the work, a revelation of one's facticity or blindness, a revelation of one's estrangement from a world deemed to have been settled by allegory, is possible. Such a revelation, which is what I suggest signifies the experience of irony, is such because it reveals one's relationship to reproduction, representation, identity, and difference, and usually, for the subject, this is a consequence of a sudden awareness of the constructed and social nature of the discourse in which they function allegorically as private and discrete identities.

The Otherness that irony can be said to articulate (without ever representing it) exists in irony's aporia, the gap between what is said (the "literal" meaning), and what is really meant (the unsaid). This gap or aporia is the common defining element of all definitions of irony. This said, one must however insist that to define irony as aporia is to radically problematise the very notion of making definitions.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this is quite specifically one of irony's effects: the impossibility of ever fully determining the "actual" meaning of an ironic utterance is thus paralleled in all attempts at defining irony as a concept (in any sort of complete, systematic, or structural way). Of course irony's refusal and resistance of definition is well known; indeed, one might say that irony has come to thematise this refusal, and, as such, its theme (of unthematizability) has often become its identity. The point irony is often used to make is one that highlights the underdetermination of all theory, and, as I take it, it is by this point that we are given the opportunity to recognise the radical tenderness of our allegories. In treating irony (and speaking of it) we acknowledge that we must detour through allegory and name something that is, ostensibly, unnameable, and though, as shall be one of my points, there are better (tender) or worse (less-tender) names and ways of coming to name, there will always be something lost or forgotten in the translation. For DeLillo, how this loss is remembered by individuals and cultures, how it is seen in relation to the production of and reproduction of signs, objects, works, identities etc., dictates the possibility of the ethical in the aesthetic work. In the

⁹ As Hayden White has pointed out aporia is "the favoured stylistic device of irony." See *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1973). p. 34.

¹⁰ De Man makes essentially the same point in his article "The Concept of Irony" where he notes the problem of defining irony by constantly deferring and undermining his own definition of it. See *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

space of this “loss”, difference (cultural difference for example), Otherness, memory, history, possibility itself, are located. Thus, for DeLillo to consider the question of irony – a theory of Otherness and loss – albeit in the context of the work of art, is also to consider the ethical.

The point of my theory of irony is to suggest the necessarily ironic nature of all theory and allegory, not just theories of irony. In general, but specifically for the purpose of this thesis, no ‘definition’ of irony is meaningful that does not attend to the necessary relationship within irony of the ironic to the allegorical, a relationship of tendering conducted between the unsaid and the said, the ‘other’ meaning and the literal meaning. As Linda Hutcheon has written: irony is not a simple “antiphrastic substitution of the unsaid (called the “ironic” meaning) for its opposite, the said (called the “literal meaning”)”.¹¹ Rather, irony

happens – in the space between (and including) the said and the unsaid; it needs both to happen. What I want to call the ‘ironic’ meaning is inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist for the interpreter, and each has no meaning in relation to the other because they literally ‘interact’ to create the real ‘ironic’ meaning. (*Irony’s Edge*, 12)

This interaction, as I see it, is ‘definitive’ of irony proper. The model it proposes, where the said and the unsaid are seen as mutually dependent on one another, is the model DeLillo assumes in the relationships of self and Other, the present and memory, the possible and the impossible, the profane and the sacred, from which his philosophy of language is drawn. It is perhaps no coincidence then that in another text on irony it is possible to find a mapping of the sort of deconstructive critique DeLillo applies in *Underworld* to the economy of the sign and the commodity. The following, a gloss on de Manic irony by Gary Handwerk is, I suggest, an accurate description of what DeLillo would also see as the predicament of the subject and the operation of allegory within the capitalist system.

The subject for de Man is inherently limited by the duplicity of language. It is ignorant in regard to what might be denominated as truth. Even worse, it is ignorant of the locus and origin of its own ignorance, hence also of any truth it might happen to speak. The subject is therefore unable to undo its ignorance, yet this very incapacity renders it especially prone to believing that it has indeed undone it. This occurs as the recurrent process of metaphoric totalization. The subject uses language to convert a world structured by the contingency of metonymic connections into one dominated by metaphoric necessity. One can therefore always trace a metaphoric chain of substitutions, by which the world is unified, back to an illicit equivalence at its origin, a leap from metonym to metaphor. This original leap is the source of the incompatibilities that generate allegorical deconstruction.¹²

¹¹ See Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1974). p.12.

¹² See Gary Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative; From Schlegel to Lacan*. (1988). p.10.

That it is possible to read a text investigating a theory of irony as a critique of the symbolic (sign) system of capitalism (because the two seemingly distinct economies, one of language and the other of the commodity, are really the same), is the great insight of *Underworld*, and DeLillo's work more generally. It is, also, the insight much of my own work in this thesis proceeds from; this isn't new: Benjamin noted throughout his career the intertwined fate in modernity of the sign/allegory and the commodity, and, as with Benjamin, it is on the strength of DeLillo's commitment to language – its tenderness, the fallenness, as I have been saying, of allegory – that the promise of a re-reading of allegory, a more faithful appraisal of its ironic truth, and with this, a re-valuing of the sign and the commodity within the economies of the postmodern may yet be realised. To do this is also, as I suggest, to reconsider the prospects of the *work* of art within the economic context it cannot be divorced from. To this end, DeLillo proceeds in *Underworld* to expose to irony, all denominational ignorance, to perform, through irony, the “deconstruction” of a culture's (and an economy's) allegories. In attempting to trace back the allegorical “chain of substitutions” to the “illicit equivalence at its origin”, DeLillo is performing a critique of the state of allegory in the capitalist economy; his purpose, one might say, is to ironize and ruin the appearance of allegory as “metaphoric totalization”, as simulation, as consumable, and restore to it its tenderness as “contingency”, as “metonymic connection”. Such an endeavour, the salvation of allegory from the misprisions of a totalising capitalist symbolic, where “everything connects” (*U*, 465) is, as I've said, based on the critical force of irony.

(iii) Otherness

In all of what has been said to this point about language, allegory and irony, the most crucial and defining aspect of DeLillo's texts, indeed, the aspect that explains most clearly the necessity of DeLillo's engagement with irony, is that of Otherness.¹³

¹³The concept of the Other brings with it a certain Phenomenological history and, largely, this is the background to my own use of the ‘concept’, particularly as it has been discussed in the critique of Phenomenology by Derrida and Levinas. Their critique, however, is not something I need to reproduce here in this thesis. In simple terms, the Other (the instance of Otherness, the personal Other) is the non-self, that which is different, that which, in the sign, exceeds what it is taken to present. Otherness, is what Derrida defers to when he places at the heart of his ‘deconstruction’ and theory of language such an ironic ‘principle’ as *différance*, a tender allegory (an allegory that tenders its own impossibility as a concept or principle) for the processes of difference and delay that bespeak the force of Otherness that can never be reduced to a final and complete meaning. Otherness is also what we can think of as

Irony, as I've said, is crucial to DeLillo's work (the aesthetic *work* of writing) since it formalises a relationship with this Otherness through its very dependency on allegory, on language and writing. The experience of Otherness, the essential experience of irony is, I argue, a consequence of the mutual contamination (or relationship) of the said and the unsaid: the force of the unsaid on the said is such that language is renewed, the said, exposed as tender, is thus exposed to demands for re-interpretation, new uses, better words; at the same time, the said, because of its very fallenness, becomes a testament, a material token, a memento or trace, lit by the light of what lies beyond it, an Otherness that disappears in the appearance of the word. The revelation of Otherness that occurs at the level of the sign is paralleled in the experience of the subject as well, as Handwerk points out: "The subject discovers in irony the degree to which it is dependent upon an alien language, speaking with the voice of the other" (173). This is an important idea for DeLillo since it becomes the basis for his recognition of the difference, estrangement, and fallenness of the self, a basis for the ethical, other-wise imagining required of the artist.

Otherness is, of course, the subject of the artist Lauren's implied inquiry in the quotation with which I began this introduction; quite apart from the figure of Tuttle, DeLillo's most explicit rendering of the Other in all his novels,¹⁴ the Otherness Lauren experiences, and that promotes the philosophical questioning that structures her narrative, is identifiable as the experience of loss. Such an experience is what interrupts her assumptions about language, interpretation, representation and their relation to the world (the Other, "space and time"), but also, is what enables her to produce her work of art. For DeLillo, as I will often insist, one's engagement with Otherness is a prerequisite for the production of art, in fact, is itself the very *work* required of art, and this *work* – a tarrying with the impossible – is conducted through irony.

applicable to language itself in so far as language always exists before the subject, constitutes the subject, but is also outside and alien to the subject, even though the subject must use language in order to experience subjectivity. In DeLillo's texts the interpersonal Other, as well as the Otherness revealed as the subject's own dimly perceived motives and desires (articulations of the unconscious) are common manifestations of this Otherness. DeLillo also records the Otherness of signifying systems and economies; their massive size, their unknowability, and, at times, the sense of their mystical functioning is a popular concern of his. The two great formulations of Otherness for DeLillo are, however, memory and time. Indeed, the two are fused by DeLillo, along with these other examples, in the evocation of an unfathomable realm of possibility, past, present, and future all combined – an infinite, impossible, reservoir in which we live, the profane inhabitants of an immanent universe.

¹⁴ Though versions of Tuttle can be found in characters like Willie Mink (*White Noise*), Lee Harvey Oswald (*Libra*), and Benno Levin (*Cosmopolis*).

Through the impossible articulation of irony we come to recognise how Otherness renders the tenderness of our ‘temporal predicament’ – Otherness, we might consider, is time itself (‘always’ and ‘already’) before it is made (allegorical) “time”, in language, or here, from *Underworld*, in music:

[S]he’d heard a boding in the bass notes that startled her. And this was the other thing they shared, the sadness and clarity of time, time mourned in the music – how the sound, the shaped vibrations made by hammers striking wire strings made them feel an odd sorrow not for particular things but for time itself, the material feel of a year or an age, the textures of unmeasured time that were lost to them now, and she turned away, looking past her lifted hand into some transparent thing he thought he could call her life. (*U*, 229)

The mourning quality of the concerto’s notes – notably made concrete and literal in the reference to the striking hammers of the piano – represent the quality of allegory when mortified by irony, stripped of its appeal to totality, stripped of its impossible mimetic ambition. Here the treatment of time becomes a metaphor for that other great association of Otherness, memory. The music is the key to recollection, and as time is turned into the notes of the concerto, time is mourned, turned into *something*, an allegory, a myth, the tenderness of notation (signs, words). In a sense, the concerto achieves what DeLillo’s fiction also achieves: a mourning of the “unmeasured” – the Otherness that is lost, but whose absence is also recognised as a condition of the possibility of translating something Other into an allegory, a name or theory, a piece of music, or a work of literature. In this way the piano stands in for the possibilities of representation, and literature as DeLillo practices it.

This mournful concerto is a suitable metaphor for DeLillo’s own compositions because it develops as its theme the Otherness of the world (of memory), that its notes can never capture, but are, no less, compelled by. The notes tender this Otherness – standing in for it, while at the same time, revealing their own tenderness, that is, their fragility or fallenness, the fact of their reduction to a material contingency. This fallenness is what makes such allegories articles of faith. What we might call “allegorical tenderness” is then what DeLillo celebrates, the ability to *keep* time (Otherness) as something other than the pure unmitigated, unimaginable and overwhelming force of alterity. Such a force would, without our tender mediation of it, render us dumb, awestruck subjects. In such a silence Otherness itself, lacking differentiation through language, would cease to be Other. However, any endeavour such as DeLillo’s that finds itself celebrating naming and allegory, mediation and tenderness, can do so only as a “theory” (a tender theory, a theory of tenderness) of

irony – a thinking of irony in excess of theory. “Time”, in the same way that allegory mourns irony, depends on its incorporation “in us”, its presenting, we might say, its allegorical embodiment. Thus, “time [Otherness] depends on us. We carry it in our muscles and genes, pass it on to the next set of time-factoring creatures, our brown eyed daughters and jug-eared sons, or how would the world keep going” (*U*, 235) [my brackets]. Carrying time “in us”, that is to say, allegorising time and Otherness, tendering presence in the name of Otherness and irony, is exactly what keeps the “world” going, and this is the pact the name has with a certain desire in relation to Otherness.

Such an understanding of Otherness and its relationship to allegory, and with this, DeLillo’s celebration of allegory as a tender form, a form committed to the process of tendering the Other, is apparent in *White Noise*. This novel, so celebrated for its visions of simulation and simulacra, but so often limited to readings of postmodern depthlessness, presents an encounter with Otherness that completely outstrips and undermines the precession of simulacra the novel ostensibly records. Otherness in this novel appears as the excess beyond the understandings and motivations of DeLillo’s characters, and yet the purpose of this is to place in relief the novel’s most consistently foregrounded, and tender, human folly: the addiction to signs, making signs, story-making, story-telling, and allegory. The “point” of *White Noise* is not so much about the predominance of modes of relentless simulation consequent to a certain saturation of consciousness by media and agents of consumption (although *White Noise* undoubtedly chronicles this), but rather to see such events and conditions as more or less useful, compelling, or faithful allegories for something in excess of the limits of representation. Simulation and representation continually recur in the novel *because* its author is committed to testing and exposing such versions of reality (such allegories), for their effects, their relative tenderness, their relative ‘truth content’, if you like, against an environment more demonstrably and demotically simulacral.

In front of the “Most Photographed Barn in America” *White Noise*’s Murray Siskind tells Jack Gladney: “we’re not here to capture an image, but to maintain one” (*WN*, 12), that is to say, to maintain allegoricity. The given is that the Barn *is* Other, even in its very utility, its demotic quiddity, the barn, as object in the world, is somehow untouchable beyond its mediated aura, and perhaps with this notion we (the reader) will recognize that we are in the postmodern; but what makes this recognition merely a condition of DeLillo’s fiction is the fact that Murray and Jack are *still* there

to tender the allegory of the barn despite what is assumed about the postmodern and the split between word and world. DeLillo's point would seem to be that we still have to be responsible for simulation, for allegory, more so in the postmodern, if we recognise that everything is allegorical. In front of the barn allegory itself becomes the issue and the article of faith, and this is because, as Sister Hermann-Marie later tells Jack, "[o]ur pretense is a dedication" (*WN*, 319). Real faith, real belief is, then, that which consists in allegory, that is, allegory demystified by irony, or what amounts to knowing the *différance* (the constant process of deferral and difference) at the heart of language. Jack is, however, horrified by the Nun's confession: "you've been praying for nothing all these years?" he asks, to which the nun replies "[f]or the world, dumb head" (*WN*, 318). The Nun's faith is, we might say, 'faithful', because she is aware of the "pretense" of the allegories of faith, because hers is a faith that, in order to be truly faithful and not merely the execution of a duty, must be ironic.

Our faith is language¹⁵ when it is understood, through irony, as the possibility of Otherness: the Nun exercises her faith in the Other – as an artist like DeLillo does – by first of all exercising her faith in language and, in doing so, making plain her belief that all the allegories of a language of belief (religion) are themselves *only* allegorical. To pray for the Other (whether this means God or "the world, dumbhead") is to conduct prayer through the fallenness of language – its tenderness – acknowledging as one does so that the only faithful application of language to Otherness is one composed in irony where the Other is articulated by what our allegories cannot articulate. The Nun's "dedication" to "pretense" is simultaneously a dedication to language *and* to Otherness. In the revelation of language's (and our own) fallenness, the Other is most faithfully articulated as Other – at once a renunciation *and* a loving and tender commitment, the Nun's prayer is an act of irony, both sacred *and* profane.

(iv) Tenderness

As should be apparent from my title this thesis insists on a central allegory: tenderness. Tenderness is an allegory that bears within itself, as its allegory (as its theme or meaning), the very force of irony that exposes all allegories, names and theories as conceptually tender, as weak or delicate, as merely vessels for a process of

¹⁵ As James Axton says in *The Names*: "[t]his is what we bring to the temple, not prayer or chant or slaughtered rams. Our offering is language" (331).

representation, as fallen, profane and human tokens of something always Other. Throughout this thesis, this allegory (tenderness), along with its variants: tender and tendering, is proposed as a sort of base demand, an assumption underpinning a certain philosophy of language, subjectivity and art, articulated in DeLillo's novels. I suggest also that because such a philosophy is premised on the consideration of the Other, or Otherness, issues of faith and the ethical are brought to bear on what are essentially aesthetic considerations. Essentially, then, this thesis is an exploration of tenderness, as an "ironic allegory" crucial to the work of DeLillo. Before saying a little more in this introduction about this ironic allegory (tenderness), I must first set out the main ways in which I interpret the term in this thesis.¹⁶ In what I say by way of the following definitions of tenderness I should add that it is usual for me to imply several of the following connotations at any given time in my use of the term, and that, despite the order in which I mention the following definitions, I do not suggest any particular hierarchy among them.

"To tender", meaning to make an "offer" or "appeal for acceptance", catches something of this sense, and as I see it, suggests the process (tendering) we commit to in trying to put names to people, objects, ideas etc., a process we, in fact, are constantly *inside* in so far as all our allegories, coming from the Other, are always destined to (serve as words or allegories for) the Other. We tender the world with language, just as the relationship we have with others, the experience of intersubjectivity, is also a process of tendering. The recognition of the primacy of the Other to all language-acts provides qualification for a further elaboration: the Other exposes to us the tender (the "delicate", "weak", underdetermined, "contingent", "fragile") nature of our allegories, and thus, ourselves as subjects (subject to language). Nevertheless, language is all we have, in fact, it is the "currency" we have with which to negotiate the world – allegories, we might say, are tokens of the law of language, they are like "legal tender" and as such they enable our commerce with Others within the economy of language. Allegories we might say, stretching further the sense of tender, are our "vessels of conveyance". Where we propose with care and consideration certain allegories or readings we are tender, "sensitive" to the effects of such commerce, the possibility of pain, an other's pain or well-being, and thus to be

¹⁶ For the sake of reference I am obliged to note that I have consulted *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989 (vol xvii, pp768-772), in the process of glossing my various uses of this term. All terms appearing in quotation marks in the above are taken from the definitions provided in this text.

“tender of” or to “become tender” is also to have reflected on the Otherness of the other-person, to have reflected on the Otherness of the Other. In order to become tender we must propose as tender (as forms of tenderness) our theories or philosophies, our judgements or actions. Thus, to regard or treat others with tenderness (to “hold dear”, “esteem” or “cherish”) is also to make tender (supple, “fragile”, “sensitive”) our offerings and representations. The possibility we have of recognising the tenderness of our allegories (that all we can do is tender them, offer them), of recognising ourselves as tender of Others, and of recognising ourselves as sites of tenderness within the world, comes to us as a possibility of irony, the medium of the articulation of Otherness. Allegories are tender – “immaterial”, “easily broken”, vulnerable to “tactless treatment”, but this tenderness (the fact of their constant tendering of new referents) is also a defining feature of allegory. So we must have a “tender regard” for allegory and language, and for this reason DeLillo holds language “dear”, as something to “cherish”. The result is what the Oxford describes as a “tender philosophy”, one that is “susceptible to moral or spiritual influence”. A theory of irony, or art, or, say, the late novels of Don DeLillo, will be tender, as I propose it, since it will not sustain anything so rigorous as a ‘theory’, except perhaps, as a theory of tendering which is itself always also a tendering *of* theory, a deconstruction of the very process that leads us, inevitably, to allegory.

A tender allegory will be one that, in light of its profound relationship to irony – its role as a trace-like articulation of Otherness – tenders further meanings and referents *because* of its underdetermination of referentiality; a tender allegory will bear within its structure the force of its undoing, its negation or reversibility (the possibility that it could mean its opposite). The writer or artist of such an allegory is content to sign this irony in the structure of their allegories because they understand that this is the very principle of the economy of language, the principle by which such possibilities of difference and invention (any possibility that relies on an imagining beyond the known) are possible. Such allegories tender new possibilities in thought, interpretation, representation etc., by recognising the tenderness of their structure, and how this is itself a trait of the constitutive, and instituting force of Otherness. Non, or less, tender allegories will, in the first instance, be conceived of in such a way as to occlude the knowledge of irony in their structure.

What DeLillo’s novels tender is the process to allegory, not so much the allegories themselves, but what is risked, what is wasted, what is engendered and what is lost in

the tendering of this Otherness through the tenderness of language. The gap or aporia that Philip Nel observed becomes in DeLillo's novels (and for some of his characters) the space of an Otherness by which our allegories may be judged more or less tender, an ethical and faith-oriented space where DeLillo asks the reader to exert the greatest scrutiny in assessing the qualities of our intersections of words with world. My argument, then, is that any useful vision of irony inheres not in theorising irony as something in particular, but rather in deconstructing the inevitable allegorization of irony into theory. Any good reading of DeLillo's novels recognises that it is not so much what these texts are "about"¹⁷ that is important to DeLillo, so much as reading the demand expressed in the texts that they present and we uncover the *work* involved in the making of meaning, that we examine the tendency to allegory that DeLillo's texts constantly seek to deconstruct. This is why artist figures and artworks feature so prominently in these novels. My focus is not so much what irony or a DeLillo text is translated as, but rather the process of translation itself that is drawn attention to by DeLillo's investigation of irony in his fiction. To this end DeLillo's texts not only examine the tenderness of what we call meaning, but observe also, and qualify, our tendering of allegories. In this regard, DeLillo is himself a practitioner of "deconstruction", not so interested in the connections made within a text (a culture etc.) as much as he is interested in examining the urge to connect; in the process DeLillo reveals not only the structure of meaning, but also the ambitions, assumptions, and motives beneath such connection-making.

(v) DeLillo's Deconstruction

DeLillo, like his contemporary, Derrida, is a writer of memory and Otherness, and for myself, in a thesis that reads DeLillo with what I take as the tender-theory most sympathetic and contemporaneous to his work, deconstruction, what is apparent is how both authors explore the question of Otherness through their engagement with

¹⁷ But, of course, DeLillo's texts are also about things, but always this 'about' is contextualised by the way DeLillo's texts foreground or examine their own semantic and signifying structures, as well as the processes of making meaning enacted in the cultures and by the individuals his novels are 'about'. And, of course, in my tendering of the novels, I shall constantly be suggesting what his allegories are *about* as well.

irony.¹⁸ Already I have made mention of memory and Otherness and suggested their relationship to what I refer to as irony, and although the relating of these terms is crucial to the argument of the thesis, I would, for now, like to sketch how these terms, as I use them, come to tender each other, and for this I refer to Derrida and what he calls the “suffering from the loss of memory”¹⁹ that is at the heart of Derrida’s writing. What I am about to suggest is that what Derrida means by this “suffering” and loss of memory is also what I mean by irony. One consequence of this “suffering”, in fact an inevitability, is that the Derridean notion of mourning is seen to describe the experience of being subject.

If there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory. The suffering at the origin of writing for me is the suffering from the loss of memory, not only forgetting or amnesia, but the effacement of traces. I would not need to write otherwise; my writing is not in the first place a philosophical writing or that of an artist, even if, in certain cases, it might look like that or take over from these other kinds of writing. My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.²⁰

This “loss of memory” is what happens when we name and incorporate the world, the Other, through allegory. Derrida, typically, leaves us here with an irony or aporia in so far as the attempt to “preserve memory” is one conducted through the “effacement of traces”, which is to say, through the loss of memory, through ‘suffering’. Here, we begin to see the ironic structure of Derrida’s mourning, something I will examine in my first chapter.

Like DeLillo, what Derrida means by ‘memory’, here, is Otherness in general – all that is lost to the subject from the moment of the present, from the subject’s articulation of the present, and their recourse to allegory. Irony is, I suggest, the best way we have of understanding the loss that Derrida situates at the “origin of writing”

¹⁸ I should mention here that I do not read Derrida’s writings as an influence on DeLillo’s work; rather, I observe how both men appear to be writing in a way, and in relation to a set of demands and assumptions, that suggest that both writers could be termed deconstructionists. I use the term “deconstruction” reluctantly, and if it has any meaning at all here it lies in the fact of those coordinating sympathies that bridge the differences between DeLillo and Derrida. This is not a thesis on deconstruction, but I do find that Derrida’s texts, especially those that deal with what he calls mourning (and because of his affinities with the likes of Benjamin, Levinas, and de Man), help signal the significance of DeLillo’s texts – his engagement with irony, his ethics, the question of faith, the *work* of art – like few other theorists or DeLillo scholars can or have.

¹⁹ The phrase carries within its ease a subtlety worth considering: the “loss of memory” is one thing to consider fairly straightforwardly as the forgotten, or all that fails to be retained in the memory of the subject. But what this phrase also suggests is that loss is *of* memory; that loss is crucial to the working of memory, and that what is called memory is, in fact, something constituted by the losses it suffers in much the same way that the economy of signs is constituted by its non-presences, its differences and delays.

²⁰ See *Points....:Interviews, 1974 – 1994* (ed. Elizabeth Weber; trans. Peggy Kamuf and others). 1995. p. 143.

as Otherness and memory. This is the loss for which we, like Derrida, can never successfully mourn, and in fact, must hope never to have ‘resolved’, as this is the loss that gives life to the economy; indeed, we might say that this loss is the desire of the economy. Derrida presents us here with a way of thinking Otherness, as well as “memory”, as the “effacement of traces” or all that is not kept in the presenting of the present, in the presence of presence. As Derrida says, were it not for this loss (something recognised in irony) “I would not need to write otherwise”²¹. The gap or aporia observed in irony (the “loss”) – the force of irony itself – is responsible for writing, is the compelling force of allegory. As such we can see how, within this thinking of writing and language, it is irony that impels the writing, though this writing will never actually *achieve* the “consolation” Derrida desires. Irony, we are now in a position to say, demonstrates that it is Otherness (the Other), that impels writing. Irony is an articulation (an impossible one since it formalises a relationship to the unnameable) of Otherness. Irony impels the name with the same breath that it mourns what the name misses. We mourn what remains Other. In the very act of preserving memory, we suffer again the loss of memory, though this is what is always at stake in writing and naming, and is what, in fact, allows for resistance, difference, interpretation, invention, Otherness and the ethical in our writing and reading practices. This paradox, as DeLillo would see it, is, I take it, the salutary point of irony.

But why write, then? How can writing assert difference and the possibility for better or worse instances and practices; how can it support critique, if all art and literature are merely rehearsals or repetitions of loss? What sets apart some acts of preservation (of memory) as ethical, more truthful, more original than others? Derrida gives us the following by way of an answer and, in a sense, I’d suggest this is the ambient condition to DeLillo’s novels of memory and naming as well. So, against the charge of mere repetition, Derrida must be clear about the repetition involved in his mourning or tendering of literature, philosophy and art.

When I say: “I love repetition,” I am lamenting the impossibility of repeating. I would like to repeat all the time, to repeat everything, which is affirmation. [...] This is an affirmative desire in the sense in which Nietzsche defined the eternal return in its relation to desire: let everything return eternally. I have the feeling there is loss when I know that things don’t repeat and that the repetition I love is not possible; this is what I call loss of memory, the loss of repetition, not repetition in the mechanical sense of the term, but of resurrection, resuscitation, regeneration. So

²¹ In typically Derridean fashion we are to read here both the force of Derrida’s injunction to write (“otherwise” he would need not) as well as his desire to “write otherwise” – to write in respect of the Other, in memory of Otherness, to write with irony and resistance.

I write in order to keep. But keeping is not a dull and dead archiving. It is at bottom a question of infinite memories, of limitless memories which would not necessarily be a philosophical or literary work, simply a great repetition. What I admire in the philosopher, what interests me most in others, finally, is that they try to construct the most *economical* machines for repeating. They place themselves at that point of the discourse where one has the greatest mastery over it, over discourse as an act of memory, of all memory in advance, which permits the formalization in an economical manner for the maximum of things to be said and thought. In this sense, for me, the philosopher is above all a guardian of memory: someone who asks himself questions about truth, Being, language, *in order to keep*, between truth and keeping.²²

What is referred to here, as the “most economical machine for repeating”, is then that text that, through its relationship to irony, continually tenders Otherness, and thus the repeating of all that might be lost, all memory. In Derrida’s terms the promise of ‘repeating’, qualified in the previous quotation as “regeneration” and “resurrection”, is that of the “maximum of things to be said and thought”. The hope for such inexhaustible textuality is also then the hope for the resistant text, the text of irony as Culler has pointed out.²³

Those whom Derrida calls “guardian[s] of memory” are, then, in DeLillo, those whom we come to think of as the artists of his novels. Once again we have returned to the intersection or crossing with which I began. Here this crossing lies at the juncture of memory (Otherness) and the articulation of this in the act of repeating (naming). Similarly, this is the crossing of what Derrida, after Heidegger, calls “truth and keeping”.²⁴ The artist or writer, as much for DeLillo as Derrida, I would argue, will be the figure who, for example, keeps themselves between memory and presence, like the writer who occupies a place between Otherness and theory (naming), irony and allegory. For the artist to “keep between” these is to maintain the economy of language (to commit to allegory) but also to maintain the promise of the “maximum of things to be said and thought”; this promise can only be ‘kept’ (in allegory) in the name of irony. To do this is to “ask questions about truth, being, [and] language” and when Derrida and DeLillo write texts, as I argue they do, ‘about’ Otherness (in the manner of mourning, the manner of irony) this is what they are attempting to do. Thus, Derrida can say: “what opens meaning and language is writing as the

²² See *Points...* (p. 144). This quote also helps explain the difficulties (if not also the anal-retentive quality) of reading Derrida, as it is his willingness for everything to repeat, and for as little as possible to be lost that sees his texts going all out to keep, preserve and relate as much of the irony, Otherness and memory that will be lost with the inevitable and necessary flexion into narrative, allegory and presence.

²³ See *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (1974) where Culler speaks of “[...] the negative capability which is reputedly the feature of the greatest works” (190).

²⁴ “Truth”, we might say, is the force of irony seen as the ‘truth’ that language shelters the loss of memory. Keeping is allegorical, is allegory itself.

disappearance of natural presence”.²⁵ What opens meaning and language is irony, and the best, most ethical and literary writing will be that which bares itself to this knowledge.

(vi) The Chapters

My first chapter “Tendering Allegory: The Tenderness of Irony and Deconstruction”, serves to elaborate my ‘theory’ of irony through the ‘ironic’ principles of Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’. Emphasis in this chapter falls mainly on Derrida’s notion of mourning, though I do prepare the reader for this discussion by contextualising irony within Derrida’s economy of terms and ‘concepts’. The point, however, is to demonstrate how in order to propose an idea of tenderness one must first find a tender (ironic) language for it. Such a language is prepared in deconstruction (an “impossible” theory, as Derrida has himself described it), and as I see it, this is because while deconstruction can be said to propose a ‘theory’ of irony, it does so only because it constantly highlights the irony of theory – of ‘doing’ theory. As a consequence of such an examination of irony (or Otherness for Derrida) we must – and this is the exigency Derrida places at the heart of deconstruction – make all appeals to knowledge, truth, world, Other, etc., as tender as possible. The language discussed in this chapter – of faith, the ethical, the Other, temporality – is, I argue, to be found in DeLillo’s texts, and is, in fact, an expression of DeLillo’s general and philosophical assumptions about subjectivity, language and the *work* of art. In this chapter we will see that the aporia of irony in deconstruction becomes the impossibility that Derrida has explicitly expressed hope for in the name of deconstruction.²⁶ Impossibility, as thought in deconstruction, becomes the tender point of Derrida’s theory, its tenderness, but also its *raison d’être* as argument, invention, and mourning – an economy of tenderness.

My second chapter “The Fallen Wonder of the World” deals with DeLillo’s *The Body Artist* and, as I read it, can be seen as a “fable” (or allegory) of deconstruction. This is to say, *The Body Artist* employs, most clearly of the novels discussed in this thesis, the “language” and assumptions we found in Chapter One on deconstruction.

²⁵ See *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Spivak). 1974. p.159.

²⁶ Derrida has often declared the opinion (in fact I’d say it amounts to a hope of his) that deconstruction is impossible and that it loses nothing from admitting this. See, for example, “Psyche: Inventions of the Other”. *Reading de Man Reading* (1989). p.36.

For this reason I place my discussion of *The Body Artist* in the thesis before my discussion of the earlier novel, *Underworld*. In a sense, *The Body Artist* is a novel that tenders the idea of invention within the experience of irony, in the memory of Otherness, and in such a way as to make consideration of where we stop when faced with the infinity and impossibility of irony; although saturated in the perspective of its protagonist and narrator, the novel is ostensibly a meditation on the more generally human issue of translating the world of experience as one's experience of the world – how, where, and when we chose to tender, with names, the world. What I refer to as the “world” here, in line with my association of it with Otherness, is what crashes in on Lauren with the sudden suicide of her lover; death, trauma, and loss, thus present her with an experience of Otherness that is also the experience of exposing one's subjectivity, one's philosophy to ironization. Lauren's passage through this experience is what generates her art-work (which is also, of course, remembering the death of her partner, a mourning work). In contrast to much of *Underworld*, *The Body Artist* is “about” an attempt made by a single person to let irony and Otherness have its sway as much as is possible without rejecting language, time, and subjectivity or lapsing into violence and paranoia.

As I've said, I begin with *The Body Artist* in my discussion of DeLillo's texts since I read it as a sort of author's handbook to the other novels. Not surprisingly, then, the text can be seen to be organised around a series of rhetorical and philosophical questions: “how much myth do we build into our experience of time” (*TBA*, 98), the artist asks, and indeed, one of the governing themes of the novel and my treatment of it is the relation of time (Otherness) to allegory. The question Lauren asks towards the end of the novel, “is reality too powerful for you?” (*C*, 122), is very much about the Otherness that lies in excess of our mythologized and mediated “realities”, about the ‘real’ that exists in excess of language, narration and subjectivity; it is a question about what is at stake in our translations of the ‘real world’, and what sort of translation of this powerful alterity is possible. Essentially, DeLillo seems to be saying, it takes something that we call art to manage such a translation, though this is an ‘art’ that can only be ‘promised’ or tendered and, moreover, only promised by, and in, irony. What makes the text a treatise on tenderness is this sense of irony. As Lauren comes to realise, the limits of allegory, myth and language, when seen as tender, are crucial to the creation and ‘promise’ of art.

My third chapter deals with DeLillo's *Underworld*. All that is private, discrete, singular and miniature in *The Body Artist*'s exploration of Otherness is prepared for, and made possible in some sense, by the massive scope of *Underworld* and its broad and rigorous analysis of the public, economic, and political responses of a culture to Otherness. *Underworld*, like *The Body Artist*, shares the concern with the *work* of art, but also takes in its ambit a plurality of cause and effect relations originating in Otherness: violence and paranoia recur as common effects, but so too, DeLillo appears to suggest, does the culture's reflex of commodity production and consumption. Again, as with *The Body Artist*, the primary context for this novel's investigation of Otherness is memory, evoked often as an underworld of waste and excess that exists beyond (beneath) the limited and rigidly enforced allegories of the capitalist system. *Underworld* is "about" the systems (read capitalism) that enable a certain forgetting of memory, as well as the construction of false, tender-less memory – how the capitalist system works to disremember its past (the Other, the experiences of Otherness lodged in a culture's collective memory), and the consequences of this on the host culture's modes of representation.

Art, memory, and allegory are constantly the major themes of the three novels I look at; all are linked by their relation to Otherness and irony. Taken together, these texts map out DeLillo's principles of writing, his philosophy of language, subjectivity and art. My final chapter thus finds in DeLillo's latest novel *Cosmopolis*, a reprise and elaboration of many of the themes and concerns discussed in the thesis so far. Eric Packer, the protagonist of *Cosmopolis*, can be read as a composite or mnemonic to all the characters that dominate DeLillo's texts; as his name suggests, he is one of the pack, all packed into one. *Cosmopolis* is 'about' theory, more specifically, about the sort of application of theory that DeLillo's own novels have so often been subjected to, and knowing of DeLillo's distaste for such overly-theoretical readings, it might be seen that *Cosmopolis*, in fact, subjects theory to an encounter with Otherness. What the novel comes up with is a kind of deconstruction of theory that leaves us on the tender boundary (or "intersection") of irony and allegory.

* * *

The essential experience of irony (as figure of impossibility) is Otherness, an Otherness that can be thought, as DeLillo and others appear to, as the memory of all

the “abandoned meanings” (*WN*, 184), “[t]he sand-grained manyness of things that can’t be counted” (*U*, 60), the excess lost in one’s experience of the present. Irony bares us to this excess and, as such, irony is revealed as the articulation of a notion of memory (the impossible memory of Otherness) that turns out to be the most vital and necessary impossibility of the whole economy within which subjectivity inheres. In tendering what I am calling the ethical (ironic) *work* of DeLillo’s texts, I hope also to show the tenderness of irony and its “ethical” demand. Throughout what follows in this thesis, I argue that irony is the primary mode of DeLillo’s late novels; from his engagement with irony comes his philosophy of language which, seen as a practice of tenderness, enables an ethical means of articulating his great subject matter: Otherness. By such a tender philosophy DeLillo is able to declare his faith in language (the fallen form) as well as his faith in an Otherness in excess of language. Irony, it appears, enables DeLillo, through the medium of his texts, to use language to talk about language, more generally, to speak from with certain conditions – ontological, linguistic, and economic – that prescribe the possibilities of speech and writing, because of its articulation of Otherness. For this reason this thesis will be “about” the impossible (something that undermines my use of “about” in the previous pages) and its betrayal in the possible. Impossibility (Otherness) we might say is my subject, though I articulate it here through irony. The consequence of this is also a kind of hope or promise embedded in the writing of DeLillo (and Derrida), a claim for a philosophy of tenderness proposed as a philosophy of writing or art.

Of course, to propose a theory of tenderness (as I’ve outlined it) in this thesis is to return to the question of irony (and mourning), though this time as the problem of writing about irony and mourning. One can’t say what irony is, just as one can’t, finally, achieve “successful mourning” as, on both counts, irony and mourning will be diminished or cancelled by this effort. As such, both present a sort of aporia or impossibility that language cannot assuage. This is as much a problem of writing a thesis on irony as it is, in the end, of writing itself, and specifically the ethical writing of Derrida and DeLillo. Indeed, one might even say that it is this awareness that is what animates the writing of these two figures; it is the insight at the heart of their work, and the exigency of their expression and articulation. This, then, would be one of Derrida and DeLillo’s major points: writing, in so far as it may be ethical or that it may come to be “literature”, needs to be seen as a ‘form’ and ‘practice’ of irony, and this is not an insight that ceases with the notion of *writing* as phonemic inscription,

but one that extends to that more generalised concept of writing Derrida signifies by his use of the word “textuality”, which implies all acts of translation and transaction between memory, Otherness, and the present, within and across subjectivities, societies and cultures. The inability to make fully present DeLillo’s “meaning” is thus paralleled in the impossibility of defining irony, though this failure is the point of the endeavour, as it is the ‘lesson’ of literature and the ‘truth’ of language.²⁷ Essentially, this is the lesson of irony – the irony of irony, of Otherness and impossibility. I can only tender a theory of irony, just as I can only tender readings of DeLillo’s texts. Any discourse I set out will itself be vulnerable (tender), as it must tender itself in relation to an Otherness it can never fully articulate. But this is what turns out to be the demand of DeLillo’s “deconstruction”, and the basis for what it would deem the ethical, and for what installs the necessity of vigorous reading practices. Theory must always be tendered – deconstruction for example, like a DeLillo text, is tender because it bears the pressure of the tendering process – that is to say, it is a tenderness, it operates as irony.

²⁷ See de Man: “[t]o the extent that it is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth” (*Allegories of Reading*, 277). Here we can see that ‘truth’ is an effect of irony (the force that is “necessary misleading”), while language can promise its truth only through irony.

Chapter One: Tendering Allegory, The Ironist's Melancholy Science

(i) Turning

In many regards all of what has been said so far about the relationship of the impossible Other, its articulation through irony, and the relationship of both Otherness and irony with allegory (the possible, the fallen and profane sign), is expressed in a single image taken from DeLillo's *The Body Artist*. Lauren comes across this 'image' after venturing into the cupola of the house in search of the origin of a noise – a “calculated stealth” (41) – she has heard before, but now hears again after the death of her partner. In looking for the source of this noise she is, without knowing so, looking for the figure of Otherness, Tuttle, she finds the next day. What is important about this passage is the suggestion DeLillo appears to make in it that the discovery of the Other is always associated with the discovery of a sign of the Other. On this day Lauren does not find Tuttle, but rather

a twirling leaf in the air beneath a tree branch that extended over the roof. There was no sign of a larva web from which the leaf might be suspended, or a strand of some bird's nest-building material. Just the leaf in midair, turning. (*TBA*, 41)

What we note here is the evocation of an impossibility (the oddity of this turning leaf) made conspicuous through association with a sign (the leaf). What DeLillo is presenting is a parable of the inevitable relationship of allegory (sign) and Otherness. In looking for the Other, Lauren finds an allegory – the allegory of the leaf, a herald of Otherness, but also a reminder of the inevitable turning fall of language. The point, it seems, is this: an openness to the possibility of the Other may reveal our experience of allegoricity, and *vice versa*, an experience of our allegoricity may open us to a perception of the Other. The leaf, turning impossibly in mid-air, is not only an allegory of this Otherness, but in the manner expressed by Benjamin, is in fact an allegory of allegory. For Benjamin the “turning” of allegory (and here we must remember that the word *trope* – what allegory is – means to turn²⁸) is its defining characteristic as fallen trope, “somersaulting” in the abyss of signification.

As those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall, so would the allegorical intention fall from emblem to emblem down into the dizziness of its bottomless depths, were it not that,

²⁸De Man, after Northrop Frye, reminds us that trope means turn, the turning of language away from the literal, for example. See “The Concept of Irony” in *Aesthetic Ideology* [hereafter *AI*].

even in the most extreme of them, it had so to turn about that all its darkness, vainglory, and godlessness seems to be nothing but self-delusion.²⁹

The perception of allegory, not as some stable entity, some contractual mimeticism, but as this tumbling and turning fall from one sign to another, from one referent to another, so much so that allegory comes to reverse itself and negate its anterior meanings, is dependent on the conception of irony at work in allegory; indeed, it is by such an ironic vision that one's perception of Otherness may be availed by the perception of allegorical tenderness – the very allegoricity of allegory, its constitution as constantly tendered and re-tendered, a constantly tendering trope impelled by an Otherness impossible for it to contain. The Other becomes the consideration affected by such tumbling allegories, since in all their turning they most faithfully signify an Otherness that must necessarily be beyond them. In a manner that suggests the structure of dialectic, the very profanity of such allegories indicates the necessity of a sacred Otherness that they can only mourn or trace, as signs of the absence of this Other. The way such “ironic allegories” remain faithful to Otherness is by virtue of their constant “misreading” and misrepresentation of it; by the force of their fallenness they stimulate and institute new allegories, new readings, new interpretations; the tumbling turn of allegory is a way of conceiving of possibility itself within the semiotic economy, and the result of all this ironic undoing of allegorical coincidence is difference.

As Susan Handleman has said of Benjamin's vision of allegory, it becomes “that very mode of philosophical contemplation which strives for the salvation of phenomena by the ruthless unmasking of their fallenness – a melancholy science”.³⁰ Paul de Man, it ought to be said, does not share with Benjamin such theological overtones or even, for that matter, Derrida's emphasis on the Other, but this

²⁹ See Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (trans. John Osborne). 1985. p.232. I'll take the opportunity here to provide a little background to the quotation and, with this, elaborate a little on some of Benjamin's language. Thus, what Benjamin refers to as the “afterlife” of a work – its endurance, if you like – is a consequence of the possibility of its iteration, the turning of the work, as an allegory, upon itself into different readings, new referents – all of which constitutes the ruination of allegory, its “mortification” which is a kind of Benjaminian synonym of criticism, or what we can think of as the *work* of exposing the limits of a work for the sake of exposing its relation to its iterative potential, its reproducibility. The revelation of “self-delusion” means that in recognizing the subjective nature of all allegories – their contingency, their iteration – we might reveal to ourselves that we are not helpless regarding hegemonic allegorical structures, since allegory has it in its structure (irony) to be re-written, re-read; allegories of “darkness”, thus, by the force of irony (this “turning”) *may* turn again to be resurrected as allegories of light.

³⁰ See Handleman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*. (1991). p. 124.

appreciation of allegory as well as this mournful melancholy science is what is nevertheless central to de Man's 'theory' of irony and more generally the work of deconstruction as performed in the texts of Derrida and DeLillo.³¹ This chapter, as I've suggested in my introduction, sets out to describe the assumptions and economic considerations at work in deconstruction that are performed in DeLillo's texts. Essentially I seek to 'define' irony through deconstruction (as a melancholy science or mode of mourning), and through irony's relationship to allegory. As such, this chapter is, in fact, an exploration of allegory, but allegory understood as an effect of the 'turning-force' that is irony. Allegory, as I will continue to argue in my chapters devoted to DeLillo's texts, needs to be seen as an effect of ironic articulation, as a "fallen wonder", a trace left by the mourning of something Other. If it is possible to detect a rhyme of sorts at play in the comparison of DeLillo's impossible, turning leaf and the somersaulting of Benjamin's allegories – both of which are images crucially involved in the evocation of Otherness – this is because in investigating language and allegory, both writers are tendering a "theory" of irony. Indeed, this is a way of considering the most faithful approach to theorising irony, recognising that one can only 'theorise' irony through the process of tendering allegory, since irony is never anything, is never an object or sign, never remains behind as a narrative, but is only ever tendered in an allegory. Allegories remain, even as mournful objects, the ruins of what they no longer contain; allegory is how we can 'know' irony, speak of it, render it, since, as has been said of irony "objectively, there is nothing there to interpret".³² For a theory of allegory to be a faithful theory of allegory it must, in the first instance be a theory of irony. As I will suggest throughout this chapter, to tender a theory of irony is to reveal the tenderness of allegory.

Essentially, this chapter proposes a theory of irony through the "language" of what I see as *the* tender and ironic "theory" *par excellence*, deconstruction. Such a language, as evinced, "theorized" and tendered by de Man and Derrida provides not only the assumptions behind my philosophy of tenderness, but also the assumptions that underpin DeLillo's work. Deconstruction, I argue, is structured like irony, in fact, structured as something very much like the necessary failure of apprehending irony or

³¹The theological emphasis of Benjamin in relation of irony and allegory (language) is, in the poststructural work of Derrida and DeLillo, supplemented and redefined to evoke an Otherness no longer tied to the notion of the transcendental, but rather a more earthly evocation of an immanent infinity (Otherness, memory) that can be thought of as the matrix of human possibility.

³² See Teskey, Gordon. *Allegory and Violence*. (1996).p. 61.

what it articulates, Otherness. As I will show, deconstruction generates meaning and an economy because of its ironic infrastructure, its perpetual proposal of ironic, aporetic structures. Indeed, in so far as deconstruction can be said to always inhabit that which it critiques, it is always already an ironic form, but in such a way as to tender its own processes while tendering what lies beyond those processes. Deconstruction places itself in quotation marks, we might say, *à la* Benjamin; it endorses, perhaps is even a name for, the tumbling turning force of re-interpretation and difference, a somersaulting and ironic fall through supplemental signifiers where the force of deconstruction is equivalent to that of criticism, ruination, mortification, revealing the fallen, profane and tender “trope” as trace of the Other. In simple terms, this chapter on deconstruction provides us with a way of understanding what I see as DeLillo’s philosophy of language, and from this, understanding what I refer to in DeLillo’s novels as the *work* of irony in the work of art.

(ii) Irony in the Work of deconstruction.

The version of ‘deconstruction’ I propose is composed of a tendering of de Man’s philosophy of language and Derridean economic and ethical concerns, in other words, a consequence of introducing de Man’s irony to Derridean *différance*. To understand the importance of the play of allegory and irony (the goal of this section of the chapter), and as such, the primacy of irony to the entire Demanic economy, we have to first understand de Man’s primary assumptions about language. Werner Hamacher, in typically Demanic fashion, tenders such assumptions, but not before taking language itself to the brink of some failure, the impossibility of its promise.

Language for de Man is ... a promise; as finite, language is never already constituted, language always is promised; but since its promise can never be fulfilled by itself as promised, this promise, at once the suspension of language, brackets *itself* – language – and confesses, since it, despite its endless suspension, thus despite its impossibility, is ‘effective,’ that it is a failed linguistic performance, a parapraxis, and *lapsus linguae*.³³

The promise of language lies in what Hamacher would see as its impossibility or Otherness, where language is “never already constituted”, is not yet a constituted language. Language cannot fulfil this promise, but it can be faithful to this promise, nonetheless, through the “confession” of its failure; because of its very failure to fulfil the promise, language promises again. This is why we can experience difference in

³³ See *Reading De Man Reading* (eds. Wlad Godzich; Lindsay Waters). 1989. p. 198. [hereafter *RDR*]

language and why, even in the most faithful interpretations, translations and repetitions, Otherness is opened on to. The settling of the promise in language – bracketing so as to give it duration and narrative – is what we call allegory, but the promise in excess, that makes the allegory possible even as it evades it, making further repetitions and interpretations possible, is what I refer to as irony.

Since, for de Man, language is a form of *lapsus*, we can say that the truth of language, and the truth of its promise, is irony. In irony, in this sense, we might situate both the promise (of Otherness) as well as the truth of the *lapsus* (and in this regard, the truth of allegory). Thus, in *Allegories of Reading*, to which Hamacher is himself responding, de Man writes, “to the extent that it is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth”.³⁴ With such an understanding we are left to understand that “truth” will be misleading, and that what is misleading will always, in some sense, also be true of language. But truth is the promise that language conveys in its “going astray”, and for this reason a true promise could only be an irony.³⁵ The truth of language is that it misleads. Therefore, the most faithful use of language will be that which admits its misprisions. Such is the force of this misleading quality of language that in our encounter with texts it is not a theory of reading so much as a theory of “misreading” we require, a theory of tendering premised on the awareness of the “fallen” tenderness of our uses of language. It is for this reason that de Man is able to say something “true” and, at the same time, say something *about* truth when he says “[c]uriously enough, it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means”.³⁶ Moreover, it is only in this way that we might also say something truthful about what it means to use language.

Perhaps needless to say, but for de Man, the “mode of language” most faithful to ‘meaning’ is, of course, the ironic mode, or, more specifically, the mode de Man refers to as “literary language”. De Man values literary language precisely because of its relationship to failure and error as the very possibilities of its generation of meaning, its generation of what he calls misreadings.

³⁴ See *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. 1979. p. 277. [referred to hereafter as *AR*]. Here I associate what de Man refers to as the “necessary misleading” with the force of irony, thus relating irony and the “truth” of language in de Man’s thought.

³⁵ I use Wayne Booth’s phrase “going astray”, taken from his *A Rhetoric of Irony*, ironically here, contra to his pejorative assessment of irony.

³⁶ See de Man. “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 1983. p.211. [hereafter *BI*]

Literature as well as criticism – the difference between them being delusive – is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself. (*AR*, 19)

“Condemned” and “privileged”, “rigorous” and “unreliable”, these paradoxes are the conditions of literary language, and the relationship of such language to truth, of truth itself as a failed promise. De Man’s term for such a condition is rhetoricity, again, another name for a mode of language, as distinct from figural language, that appears to trace in its ‘structure’ a debt to irony. Thus, what de Man calls rhetorical language is figural language (naming etc) which has become aware of itself as figural, as split from the world it naïvely thought to have truly, naturally and faithfully mirrored. Rhetorical language (literary language) testifies to the ‘truth’ of language, its aberration and failure and thus to the truth of allegory – that is always the other face of irony. Because of the rhetoricity of language all readings are thus, for de Man, in fact, misreadings. As de Man has said: “[b]y a good misreading, I mean a text that produces another text which can itself be shown to be an interesting misreading, a text which engenders additional texts”.³⁷

A good misreading is, then, what de Man praises in Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, just as it is also what he values about the ‘literary language’ of Rousseau’s text, an ironic text that goes beyond the allegorical or figural mode,

[...] for as it accounts for its own mode of writing, it states at the same time the necessity of making this statement itself in an indirect, figural way that knows it will be misunderstood by being taken literally. Accounting for the ‘rhetoricity’ of its own mode, the text also postulates the necessity of its own misreading. It knows and asserts that it will be misunderstood. [this is why de Man applauds Derrida for his reading of Rousseau that goes out of its way “not to understand him” (135)] It tells the story, the allegory of its misunderstanding: the necessary degradation of melody into harmony, of language into painting, of the language of passion into the language of need, of metaphor into literal meaning. In accordance with its own language, it can only tell this story as a fiction, knowing full well that the fiction will be taken for fact and the fact for fiction; such is the necessarily ambivalent nature of literary language. (*BI*, 136) [my brackets]

A text that accounts for its own “rhetoricity” and thus “postulates the necessity of its own misreading” is a text that will most resemble what I have been referring to, in the name of DeLillo’s texts, as the *work* of art. A reading, or text, or interpretation, practised in this way, opens itself to the truth of textuality and Otherness, but only because first of all such a reading is situated in a text, just as an irony must always be grounded in an allegory. As de Man says,

³⁷ Quoted in Vincent B. Leitch. *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*. 1983. p.186.

[S]ince interpretation is nothing but the possibility of error, by claiming that a certain degree of blindness is part of the specificity of all literature we also reaffirm the absolute dependence of the interpretation on the text and of the text on the interpretation. (*BI*, 141)

Hence, we cannot justify “transcendental readings”, but rather must read the text closely and competently. The most tender readings – those that for DeLillo I suggest qualify, and redeem, the work of art – are those that, in a profoundly contextual manner (which is to say, from within a host text) most faithfully reproduce the text’s very relation to its own reproducibility by the radical mortifying (ironising) of its allegorical presentations. This is only possible of the tenderest misreadings that, themselves, tender the contract we have, and that our texts and signs ought to be seen to bear, with Otherness. Deconstruction, we might say, in view of irony, always tenders an allegory of a misreading, but, as de Man has taught, the possibility of misreading is also the possibility of understanding. De Man’s theory of misreading is a theory of what I have been calling tendering – a mournful or melancholic process of tendering certain contingent errors or failures to the purpose of generating a semiotic economy whose relationship to error, loss, irony, is what generates further semiotic events, signs, etc. Such an economy enables the ethical at the point at which the impossible Otherness traced through its instances of error, is recognised as the excess it is a possibility of.

In effect, it is by what de Man says about irony – the impossible promise of language – and its other, its constituent, allegory, that we shall understand the tenderness of deconstruction. Hamacher, again, in a manner proleptic of my own destination in this chapter, ties this work, this relationship of allegory and irony, to the *work* of deconstruction – mourning – when he writes the following:

No allegory can grasp the incidences of irony by which it is disrupted, none can catch up with the positing violence of the imperative, but each one – for each one remains exposed to its positing – must undertake the attempt to translate it into a cognitive content. The allegory of the imperative is the endless labor of mourning the traumas inflicted by irony. But the imperative is, as positing, as exposed, itself the irony in whose light its allegory disintegrates. (*RDR*, 199)

Hamacher here provides us with an allegory for the relationship of allegory to the “positing violence” and turning force of irony. Something, also, of the melancholia of the ironist is shown here too in the mourning quality definitive of de Man’s language-conscious self. But the ‘traumas’ of irony are also what we might consider as the processes of tendering installed by irony; in irony’s ruining of allegory it also posits anew the allegorical imperative. Every allegory, every manifestation of “cognitive content”, mourns all that it cannot hold; the promise allegory fails to keep is

consequent to its contract with irony – the result is mutually beneficial: the proliferation of allegories on the one hand, and the faithful maintenance of Otherness, on the other. Irony, in this sense, is the imperative that posits allegory while, at the same time, exposing allegorical cognitions to the undermining force from which they are in the “first instance” constituted. Thus, allegory, when conceived of in its relation to irony, is not just the theme of the translation of Otherness into cognitive content, but moreover, the thematization of translation itself, as mourning, as continual, perpetual tendering process – the promise of the name, the promise the name cannot keep. So, in the language of Derrida, the *work* of mourning sets out the tenderness of our relation of language and the Other – which is to say, our relationship to and of irony.

What is meant by tenderness is, then, both the way irony tenders allegory via the imperative to posit a name or sign, as well as the way allegorical cognitions become tender and vulnerable, through exposure to the force of irony. But there is more to allegory than this, as we shall see, since irony itself, in depending on allegory, becomes tendered by allegory also – which is to say, allegories (our names, definitions, theories and traditions etc.,) are responsible for giving irony its chance to promise again, to repeat, to iterate. To understand this better we need to return to de Man’s “The Rhetoric of Temporality”, and in particular to the trope of allegory. As de Man teaches, allegory can be thought of as irony turned towards narrative and duration. Irony, essentially a “synchronic” moment or “happening”, tenders allegory at the very entry point of language – the point at which irony is rendered, given an effect of presence, and is felt as a cognition or figure of something Other. In tendering language, irony becomes allegory, as that which reveals the economy of tropes, figural and rhetorical, and the system of equivalences whereby a word or concept stands in for, becomes a tender for, that which is Other to it, that which escapes its presence. In this way (this, “standing in for”) allegory gives to us the sense of narrative, of duration, of being-in-time, and consequently the effects known as history and tradition. Allegory always misses the world, the Other, and irony, though it is installed by these forces. But in exchange for this misapprehension, allegory offers the experience of contiguity and presence, albeit a “fabled” or “fictional” experience of presence and present, that acts as a chain of cognitions and equivalences in the

manner familiar to us after post-structuralism as the relationships between signifiers and other signifiers.³⁸ Thus de Man writes:

[I]t remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. (*BI*, 207)

The force of this non-coincidence (anteriority) sealed within the trope of coincidence – one sign substituting for another – reveals the paradox of allegory that is, in fact, a definition of irony articulated through a definition of allegory. Allegories cannot *be*, as such, without being in relation to other allegories, as signs to other signs,³⁹ and it is from this play of repetition (what Derrida refers to as iteration) involving the similarity, dissimulation, and non-coincidence of signs, that the system builds continuity, effects of presence and history.

However, and in typically Demanic fashion, such effects of presence and temporality (self, history), as possibilities of allegory, are possibilities of what allegory actually ‘represents’ – systemic aberration:

And just as the indeterminacy of reference generates the illusion of a subject, a narrator, and a reader, it also generates the metaphor of temporality. A narrative endlessly tells the story of its own denominational aberration and it can only repeat the aberration on various levels of rhetorical complexity. Texts engender texts as a result of their necessarily aberrant semantic structure; hence the fact that they consist of a series of repetitive reversals that engender the semblance of a temporal sequence. (*AR*, 162)

Aberrance, we might then consider, is equivalent to the somersaulting Benjamin ascribes to allegory; aberration manifests as allegory. This is because allegory is always a property of irony, though, for Derrida, irony and allegory are faces of the same coin,⁴⁰ but de Man is seemingly less equivocal, and on various occasions appears to indicate that irony’s Otherness to allegory is in fact the Otherness from which allegory is made possible. Thus, de Man’s often repeated closing phrase from *Allegories of Reading*:

³⁸ De Man: “The fundamental structure of allegory reappears here in the tendency of the language toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject” (*BI*, 225). The simultaneous quality referred to here is that of irony which is also the moment of synchrony that we can think of as the constant and ever recurring moment of *différance*, of plenitude. When de Man mentions an “imaginary time” he is talking of the fictional nature of narrative, and the factitious quality of human experience.

³⁹ We can think of allegory as the “relations of mapping one sign with another, of sublating one sign by another” (*Reading de Man Reading*, p.xxiii)

⁴⁰ See *Memoires for Paul de Man* (11; 81). De Man refers to them as the “two faces of the same fundamental experience of time” in *Blindness and Insight* (p. 236).

Irony is no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other words, of understanding. As such, far from closing off the tropological system, irony enforces the repetition of its aberration. (301)

The implication seems to be that while allegory is tropological, irony (which in some sense remains a trope) is metatropic, that which enables “tropological cognition” itself. In this scheme, irony is seen to be a constituting force by virtue of its “undoing” of cognitions, figures and tropes. Allegories ‘succeed’ because they ‘fail’, and it is irony that therefore engenders this economy of differences and deferrals – the constant inexhaustible repetition of “aberrations” that enable the effects of positive content within the play of negation. It needs to be remembered, however, that irony cannot, as such, be metatropic or outside language, *because* of its relationship to allegory.

What appears to be emerging here, in this tendering of a theory of irony, after de Man, is the mutual and mutually contaminated structure of allegory and irony. This structure, characterised as a kind of melancholy science or mournful work, is exactly what I mean by my use of the term irony. One way of understanding irony in the Demanic economy is provided by de Man in his article “The Concept of Irony”, where he draws on Northrop Frye’s definition of the trope (the tropes of language) as “a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its obvious meaning” (164). Trope thus defined, as “that turning away, that deviation between literal and figural meaning” (164) provides the context for de Man’s “definition” of irony as the “trope of tropes”, the truth or force of all tropes, the “one that names the term as the ‘turning away’” (165). In the same article de Man refines this “definition” a little when he describes irony as the “permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes”. “[P]ermanent parabasis” is Friedrich Schlegel’s formulation of what we might more simply express as permanent or perpetual interruption, and in the context provided, this amounts to the interruption or digression from the tendering of the very structure or narrative of the tropes of language. As de Man says

The allegory of tropes has its own narrative coherence, its own systematicity, which irony interrupts, disrupts. So one could say that any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative, and it is ironic, as we say, that irony always comes up in relation to theories of narrative, when irony is precisely what makes it impossible ever to achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent. Which doesn’t mean that we don’t have to keep working on it, because that’s all we can do, but it will always be interrupted, always be disrupted, always be undone by the ironic dimension which it will necessarily contain. (*AI*, 179)

Rather than merely restating irony as permanent parabasis, de Man says it is the “permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes”. What is significant about de Man’s

qualification is his association of parabasis with allegory. In effect de Man is ironising the theory of irony *as* parabasis (what Kierkegaard would call “infinite, absolute negativity”) by making it relational to allegory. As such, de Man articulates *the* crucial consideration in all ‘theories’ of irony – the move that tethers irony to allegory in a mutual contamination, a relation of tendering. This also suggests the perpetual ironisation of any theory (allegory) of language and its tropes, suggesting that all theory is tender. Which means that any theory of irony, or allegory, or art, is destined to be underdetermined, an act of misprision, or blindness. All insights (into text, language) as de Man has made clear are constituted in, and repeat, forms of blindness; the best, however, are those that recognise misprision as the structure of their possibility, as genesis⁴¹ to the repetition of readings, the iteration of differences, other-expressions. Recognition of the tenderness of theory (its underdetermination) reveals the best theory as a process of tendering.

By ironising the notion of “permanent parabasis” in this way, de Man makes irony an economic consideration, that is to say, one that tenders the economy of signs, text and meaning. In this way, as I have been suggesting, irony becomes tender through its necessary relation to, and dependency on, allegory (narrative, duration, sign, name); only through allegory is an irony recognisable as irony. On the one hand, then, de Man’s definition of irony emphasises impossibility, on the other, it suggests the requirement, in such a definition, of the possible, of fallen allegory. In this regard, we find in irony an enactment of Benjamin’s dialectic of the sacred and the profane. Irony as parabasis, as experience of Otherness, is always bound by an allegorical context – an arrangement de Man finds evident in Laurence Sterne’s discussion of irony as “the constant interruption of the narrative illusion by intrusion” (*AI*, 178). Such moments of parabasis, moments of irony, are to be found then in what we term the metatextual moments of a text, those *punctum* moments Barthes identifies in photography, where a subject stares back at the audience, breaking the contract of subject and object, and like other moments of textual self-awareness when an author disrupts the façade of their narrative to address the reader. Such examples all resemble appeals to an Other, all are examples of a tendering of Otherness through a making tender (the ruining of a work’s illusion), that reveals the tenderness of textuality. Another way of thinking this is to say that irony is the means by which we use the

⁴¹ As Claire Colebrook puts it: “Irony, for de Man, is like Derrida’s *différance*: a radically anterior condition of conceptuality that itself is ‘not a concept’”. *Irony in the Work of Philosophy*. 2002. p.194.

only tools available (language, metaphysics, ontology) to rethink the way we use the tools available. This is essentially the irony of deconstruction, the task of attempting the most faithful reflection on itself for the purpose of revealing to philosophy (itself) its Otherness.

* * *

What Derrida calls the “movements of deconstruction” are recognisable as the turning force of ironies that

[...] do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.⁴²

What emerges, it seems, is a growing homology between irony and (the “enterprise” of) deconstruction, especially in so far as both rely, for the efficacy of their economies, on what the relationship between allegory and irony evidences: a dependence on texts, histories, traditions and norms, as well as a relationship of belonging and breaking. In deferment to irony, and recalling the considerations of de Man, Kevin Hart, for example, illustrates the tendering of irony and deconstruction:

Needless to say, perhaps, not even deconstruction can claim immunity from irony in this state of affairs. A deconstructive reading of a text, despite what it does to previous readings, will always be an allegory of the text and, as such, be subject to a deconstruction to the second degree. At this level of sophistication, irony is as described by Friedrich Schlegel, ‘a permanent parabasis’. So for de Man irony is always one step ahead of allegory: as a contingent temporal sequence, of course, but also because the possibility of being ironised is written into the structure of allegory. If this is true, de Man is perfectly correct to remark that ‘Irony is no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other words, of understanding’. Or in the vocabulary we have refined: irony is not simply a trope, it is also, when generalised, *both* the condition of possibility for all tropes *and* the condition of impossibility for any cognition which is not conditioned by tropes.⁴³

⁴² *Of Grammatology*. (p.24). Notably the same passage quoted here turns up in Hart’s text (*The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*. 1989. p.157) where, usefully enough, he places it in the context of the relation of allegory and irony:

To translate this [the passage from *Of Grammatology*] into the language of rhetoric: allegory supplies the necessary structure for its ironic subversion, and of course the subversion brought about by irony is itself open to be overturned to the extent to which the ironic becomes canonised as ‘literature’ (as with Swift) or ‘philosophy’ (as with Socrates). In passing from allegory to irony there is a movement that is at once violent and miniscule, through the agency of an adopted tone or attitude. So while allegory in no way entails irony or *vice versa*, deconstruction can be seen to subvert allegory by realising the ironic possibilities inherent in its structure. (158)

⁴³ *The Trespass of the Sign*. p.158.

A pure irony could never be, it would never leave its trace; this is why ironies share their structure with allegory, and why irony gets caught, in fact, constantly hopes for its apprehension – its reading, its writing, its naming. Permanent parabasis, as such, is a myth, indeed an *allegory* of irony's insatiable, atemporal and incessant force of undoing. Permanent parabasis is a possibility of irony, but never *is* irony; indeed, we might say that it is the impossibility – akin to the movement of *différance* or the Other – that makes irony and its effects possible. The 'irony' of irony is that it can never be, *as such*. Rather, the effect of irony is what we are left with, and what that *is*, is the appearance of its disappearance, the allegory or "meaning" that we always take to be the irony we have caught.

Because deconstruction hopes for its own impossibility, and in a sense, tries to resist its own allegorization (that is to say, resists becoming a "Theory"), it resists naming irony. However, in the manner of de Man, this is primarily what enables deconstruction to constantly address irony proper. The way deconstruction writes irony (that is to say, specifically avoids writing it) is by attending as closely as possible to allegory, in fact, by inhabiting allegory in the same way in which Derrida's texts always inhabit the texts and traditions they deconstruct. By writing allegory in deconstruction, Derrida is constantly tendering irony (irony can only be tendered, it can never *be*, as such, be known or made fully present) through its other face, allegory.⁴⁴ This is the lesson, as we shall soon see, of the trace in relation to *différance*. Thus, Derrida writes irony in the name of the Other (in the name of de Man), the disappeared, the dead, and what will always already have been lost.

(iii) The Economy of Tenderness.

As I've already said, the purpose of this chapter is to establish the link between irony and tenderness through the 'ironic' language and economy of Derridean and Demanic 'deconstruction'. As we have seen, one way of doing this is through a tendering of de Man's philosophy of language (premised on his investigation of irony and allegory). Another way is to examine the tenderness of Derrida's 'deconstruction' as concentrated within the key Derridean concern, *différance*. This section in this chapter

⁴⁴ In "Psyche: Inventions of the Other" Derrida refers to allegory as the "other face" of irony. See *Reading de Man Reading*, p. 34.

is, thus, primarily devoted to the tendering of *différance* as a form of irony, as condition to tenderness. In anticipation of what I will shortly articulate, let me say briefly, here, that much of the significance of *différance* to the present study inheres in the fact of its tendering of its own conceptuality, even as it ruins or defers conceptuality at the same time; *différance*, as a sort of metonymy for the entire Derridean economy, highlights Derrida's constant tendering of language in light of an Otherness in excess of language. All of what we see as ethical and faithful in deconstruction comes from *différance*, a demand articulated (*à la* melancholy and mourning) through irony.

Towards the end of the last section one of my emerging themes was that of the homology between irony and deconstruction, and in another 'economical' expression of the economy of deconstruction – its relational, tendering infrastructure – Derrida provides us once again with a context for the tendering of a "definition" of irony when he writes of the "force" of deconstruction:

The result, both paradoxical and foreseeable, is that the very thing which exceeds at the same time the theoretical, the thematic, the thetic, the philosophical, and the scientific provokes as gestures of reappropriation and suture, theoretical movements, productions of theorems, which, in the sort of hyperactivity, turmoil, turbulence which has characterised the past twenty years, are themselves so many forms of resistance, but this time in another sense [...]. This time the resistance institutes – it is indeed essentially instituting – [a] consolidating and stabilizing structure.⁴⁵

The pairing of such imperatives, excess and suture, turmoil and stabilization, are themselves effects of the force of deconstruction, of the force of an irony that evokes a state of excess – an Otherness – through the production of allegories, theories and reappropriations. The possibility of this sort of homology of irony and deconstruction, a sort of substitution of irony as a 'name' for the *work* of deconstruction, is a possibility Derrida acknowledges as descriptive of deconstruction itself.

The word "deconstruction", like all other words, acquires value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a "context". For me, for what I have tried and still try to write, the word has interest only within a certain context, where it replaces and lets itself be determined by such words as "écriture," "trace," "différance," "hymen," "pharmakon," [...] etc. By definition, the list can never be closed, and I have cited only names, which is inadequate and done only for reasons of economy.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ (Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms About Neo-Logicism, Newisms, Positisms, and Other Small Seismisms" in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (eds. Patricia Waugh; Philip Rice). 1996. p.370.

⁴⁶ See Jacques Derrida in *Derrida and Différance* (eds. David Wood; Robert Bernasconi). 1988. p.4. The key phrase here is "reasons of economy" which, as Derrida would have it, means, at the very least, both the demand to make an 'economical' expression of something complicated, and the demand to outline the workings of an economy of meaning, a symbolic economy. Issues of economy are always

This is, we might say, an *economic* expression of deconstruction, not only for its detailing of a Derridean economy, but also, and importantly, for the quality of its concession to explanation and naming. So we can read the above as a kind of abridgement – a certain fall, from *différance*, but kept in language – because names operate in an economy of *différance*, as I shall show, and because, inevitably, it is to an economy we will have to return, in the manner of a certain law, in the way of context, history and tradition. The inevitability of this return to language, again a kind of fall or return to allegory, is made possible by *différance*.

At some base level of all Derridean texts, the demands faced by the subject to relate their being-in-language with their being-in-the-world, can be expressed as the difficulty of having to tender ‘deconstruction’ for comprehension in language in such a way as to satisfy both the greatest precision and the greatest clarity. Such demands are evident in the very structure of Derrida’s *différance* – a concept that, of itself, can be *seen* to recapitulate the entire ironic infrastructure of deconstruction through the visible but unheard sign of the letter “a” in its inscription. So, when Derrida writes on the appearance of the “a” in *différance* in effect he is also attending to the moment of irony. The “a”, we might say, can be seen as irony in action, a sign or trace of the Other (the *autre*) in writing.

Thus, even if one seeks to pass over such an infraction [the insinuation of the *a*; the moment of undecidability] in silence, the interest that one takes in it can be recognised and situated in advance as prescribed by the mute irony, the inaudible misplacement, of this literal permutation. One can always act as if it made no difference. And I must state here and now that today’s discourse will be less a justification of, and even less an apology for, this silent lapse in spelling, than a kind of insistent intensification of its play.⁴⁷ [My brackets]

Irony will have been the mute force or “infraction” in all deconstruction – present, but crucially, not present, there but not there – as it appears in the character of the small letter “a”. So what we are looking for in Derrida’s texts is this ghosted presence of irony, the figure as non-figure, the concept as non-concept, that thematizes, in itself, the ghosting of Otherness in writing. This “a” is the “undecidable” presence in *différance* (with its silence in the speaking of the word) in the same way that irony is that which traverses between the sayable and the unsayable, between the written and the spoken, between the same and the different, and, *pace* de Man, between (diachronic) allegory and (synchronic allegory) irony itself.

crucial for Derrida, especially in the way in which they thus focus the demands of tendering that always situate Derrida’s acts of writing between language and Other, text and reader.

⁴⁷ Derrida. *Margins of Philosophy* (trans. Alan Bass). 1981. p.3. [hereafter referred to as *MP*]

But just as *différance*, thus explicated, is seen to tender Otherness through its inculcation of an articulating irony (the “a”), it must still be tendered in language, and thus, for the sake of clarity, Derrida permits a sort of definition of *différance* that hinges on its treatment as a concept when he writes:

In a conceptuality adhering to classical strictures “*différance*” would be said to designate a constitutive, productive, and originary causality, the process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences. (MP, 8)

Derrida’s point in conceding to tender a “definition” of *différance*, to make an economical expression of it, is that *différance* itself is the very law of the semiotic economy of language; *différance* is the principle of tendering.⁴⁸ Thus, the attempt to “define” *différance* involves a recapitulation of the *work* of the semiotic economy, the production of different things (readings, meanings, etc.); *différance* is a “name” for the “originary causality” that continually constitutes and renovates language, but only because, as the “name” *différance* makes clear, it comports within itself an irony (the “a”) that maintains an open channel to Otherness. To put it crudely, *différance* recapitulates the ‘force’ of deconstruction and deconstruction’s constant tendering of economic considerations, because it operates as an irony, saying one thing, meaning an-other. On the subject of *différance* and in relation to the question of economy Derrida writes:

It [*différance*] is the economical concept, and since there is no economy without *différance*, it is the most general structure of economy, given that one understands by economy something other than the classical economy of metaphysics, or the classical metaphysics of economy. *Second*, the movement of *différance*, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language, such as [...] sensible/intelligible, intuition/signification, nature/culture, etc. As a common root, *différance* is also the element of the *same* (to be distinguished from the identical) in which these oppositions are announced. *Third*, *différance* is also the production, if it can still be put this way, of these differences, of the diacricity that the linguistics generated by Saussure, and all the structural sciences modeled upon it, have recalled is the condition for any signification and any structure. These differences [...] are the effects of *différance*; they are neither inscribed in the heavens, nor in the brain, which does not mean that they are produced by the activity of some speaking subject. From this point of view, the concept of *différance* is neither simply structuralist, nor simply geneticist, such an alternative itself being an “effect” of *différance*.⁴⁹

This is one of the most crucial and economical expressions of *différance* you will find among Derrida’s texts, and the reason for this is that he allows for a tendering of *différance* to conceptuality. Thus, *différance* is the “economical concept” even as it is

⁴⁸ Indeed, it perhaps needs to be pointed out that tendering (translation in this sense) is, we might say, the subject matter of deconstruction, since it is the process Derrida always performs in his texts – hence interviews and explanations, repetitions, re-writings and supplements are characteristic of Derrida’s deconstruction.

⁴⁹ Derrida. *Positions*. (Alan Bass. trans.) The University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1982. (p.8).

also what gives the idea of “economy”, and “concept”, as well as the phrase: “economical concept”, their effects *as* concepts. Like irony, *différance* is not actually a concept, but rather the “common root” of all conceptuality and all conceptual oppositions. Irony in this sense is also root to the so-called non-ironic instance of that which forms the oppositional structure within which irony itself is so often posed. *Différance* is what gets the whole system of concepts, the whole economy of effects and differences, going. Vincent Descombes, in an “economical” gesture of his own, expresses this in writing the following, installing *différance* as the effect of an originary delay:

The concept of an ‘originary delay’ is paradoxical but necessary. If *from the origin onwards* (each time there is origin), from the ‘first time’ onwards, there were no *différance*, then the first time would not be the ‘first time’, for it would not be followed by a ‘second time’; and if the ‘first time’ were the ‘only time’, it would not be at the origin of anything at all. [...] [I]t must be said that the first is not the first if there is not a second to follow it. Consequently, the second is not that which merely arrives, like a latecomer, *after* the first, but that which permits the first to be the first. The first cannot be the first unaided, by its own properties alone: the second, with all the force of its delay, must come to the assistance of the first. It is through the second that the first is the first. The ‘second time’ thus has priority of a kind over the ‘first time’: it is present from the first time onwards as the prerequisite of the first’s priority without itself being a more primitive ‘first time’, of course; it follows that the ‘first time’ is in reality the ‘third time’.⁵⁰

Again, we find in a mapping of the temporal and spatial effects of *différance* a tracing of irony. Difference is here seen as the force that makes all economies possible; all effects of a “first time”, of presence or allegory, name or ‘origin’ are made possible by the forces irony and difference share: difference, delay, and dispersion. Irony is prerequisite of allegory just as Descombes implies that the Other is prerequisite of identity. What Descombes refers to as the originary delay – the spacing and differences of *différance* – is what enables talk, and economies, of “origin”, conceptuality, and presence. As Descombes suggests, there will always already have been something (Otherness) from which such effects of presence have come. The articulation of this Otherness occurs in Derrida’s *différance*.

Différance, like irony, is, then, the articulation of Otherness; as such, both are structured as tender processes, processes that thematise their own conceptual tenderness. This is the reason why Derrida can say that *différance* is a “possible substitution” for the word deconstruction. Deconstruction “works”, by proposing its own chain of substitutable terms that always bear the trace of each other and that are themselves constantly shifting with new terms and readings – in this way, what one may call Derrida’s economy is always built on elements that are themselves

⁵⁰ Vincent Descombes. *Modern French Philosophy*. 1980. p.145.

contaminated by the trace of the Other. In a sense, then, deconstruction is fundamentally allegorical; it perpetually exposes itself to the very processes of allegorical deconstruction it performs on allegories. In this regard, deconstruction is faithful to *différance*, not merely because it observes differences within and between subjects, between objects, signs or events, but because it makes thematic the exposure of its own difference from itself, perpetually. This is a model for the impossible relationship Descombes parodies by his own act of impossible articulation, of self, and Other, the contaminate temporal and spatial structure of *différance*.

In observing the tumbling turning of tropes in the Benjaminian abyss, ‘deconstruction’ itself – hence, the difficulties of using the word as a noun – tumbles and turns, is re-written, and re-read in the chain of supplements invented by its own constant tendering of Otherness. In this regard, what we call ‘deconstruction’ is nothing more than an ironic allegory for the tendering law of the economy of language. As Derrida says,

Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general. For the same reason, *différance*, which is not a concept, is not simply a word, that is, what is generally represented as the calm, present, and self-referential unity of concept and phonic material. (MP, 11)

So, *différance*, in the manner of irony (“not *simply* a word”) is a ‘name’ for the economic principle of deconstruction, describing the operations of the Derridean economy, and the “very possibility of conceptuality”. What Derrida refers to as the “systematic play of differences” recognises that within the economy no sign, word, or subject can exist without being tender of, and tendered by, another sign, word, or subject. *Différance* is then the condition for all identity, allegory, unity, or boundary – all seemingly discreet instances within the economy are thus the possibilities of what is always different from them, that is to say, all that is always Other to them. As a consequence of this, every sign or subject is always within Otherness, within what I have referred to as an immanent world, a world, if you like, of memory; but what this also means, since every instance of this economy is composed of differences, is that all that is different and Other can, depending on the tender qualities of one’s ‘reading’, be traced within the specific or individual subject or sign. This revelation of the Other within the work or subject or allegory, and the obverse, the revelation of the

utter dependency of allegory and subject on what is beyond them, is the revelation of irony, the revelation of *différance*.

What all this means, in relation to the production of a work of art, a novel, or any “invention”, is that any such work that aspires to be a faithful representation of anything at all, must be a work that is faithful to the memory of differences – the Otherness – it inheres in, and is a possibility of. Which is to say, that it must be an invention that remembers Otherness, and that, to some degree, reproduces the very forces of reproduction (the economy) that are always traced within the work itself. The invention – indeed, as we will see in the next section – for it to be an invention must represent its debt to *différance* and irony. All that Derrida calls the ethical, and what, I suggest, for DeLillo qualifies his own theories on the *work* of art, issues from this debt.

(iv) The Irony of Invention

The question of the ethical in deconstruction can be seen to be posed as the question of irony couched in the context of what Derrida refers to in the following quotation as possibility. As we will see, the structure of this possibility is written in the sign as the possibility of misreading; contingent failures of understanding are the conditions of possibility. For us to mean what we say it must be possible for our meaning to be mistaken. The possibility of this failure, as I’ve been saying, is what generates the semiotic economy; the possibility of this failure is “ineradicable” and is what I term irony. This is the background to the work of invention (art, interpretation) that, as we will see, must pass through the chiasmatic structure of irony. Derrida explains this irony and the possibility of the ethical like this:

It is simply that the *possibility* of something evil, or of some corruption, the *possibility* of the non-accomplishment, or of some failure, is *ineradicable*. And it is so because it is the condition for every felicity, every positive value – the condition for ethics for instance. So if you want to eradicate the *possibility* of this negative then you destroy what you want to save. Thus ethics couldn’t be ethical without the ineradicable *possibility* of evil. [...] The possibility of infelicity, non-fulfilment, is part of what it is that we want to save under the name of ethics, felicity, fulfilment and so on. For me this concept of possibility, of possibility as something which has to be saved at the moment that it may ruin what we want to save, this ‘possibility as impossibility’, is the most unavoidable argument today.⁵¹

Throughout this section I propose Derrida’s thoughts on the issue of invention, and its relationship to the ethical, as a way of providing context for what we will later

⁵¹ See Glendinning, Simon (ed.) *Arguing with Derrida*. 2001. p.54.

consider the *work* of art in DeLillo's novels. To return to Derrida's quotation, however, we can see that two questions arise and are applicable to this goal of qualifying the idea of invention and the *work* of art: firstly, how to maintain this "possibility" – the ironic aporia from which new readings come from the Other – as possibility? Secondly, how do we successfully make distinct the possibility of "some corruption" from some "felicity"? Derrida gives us an answer to both questions when he says it is the concept of possibility "as something that has to be saved at the moment that it may ruin what we want to save" that is the issue, the "most unavoidable argument today". To answer my first question is also, then, to satisfy the second. In other words, our focus as interpreters, readers, subjects, should not fall on a particular reading produced by a text, but rather, the reproducing structure of a text: not what a text says, but how it makes such readings possible. In attending to a work's *work* of reproduction – its reproducibility, how it generates meanings, how it is generated by differences it cannot master – and in producing works that help reflect on this process we are able to usefully distinguish between the more or less tender meanings these works produce. The better, more 'felicitous' readings will thus be those that in representing the unrepresentable condition of their own possibility remain open to re-inscription, and re-examination; as more faithful articulations of Otherness, such readings never become fixed. To borrow again from Benjamin, the "possibility of evil", we might say, may turn again another somersault.

On the strength of these first two sentences Derrida, in effect, situates irony – as the possibility of failure – as the "condition for ethics". The question of the ethical, as with notions of truth, argument, faith or decision, thus rests on the irony of possibility, which is to say that for the said possibility (an instance of the ethical, in this case) to be possible it must maintain, as possible, that which would make the given possibility, impossible (as that which may "ruin what we want to save"). For this reason, the idea of "radical evil" has a place in the ethical. The argument of "possibility as impossibility" is what keeps philosophy open, what enables argument and keeps it going as possibility. "Possibility as impossibility", or that which is "saved" as it is "ruined", is an articulation of irony and its necessary relation to allegory. Philosophy must relate to impossibility, as to irony, as an aporia to be affirmed:

For the very same structure that interrupts the propriety of philosophy and opens it to its 'other' always also opens up the possibility for what philosophy (as such) can never anticipate. The 'other' of philosophy that is no longer *its* other. Thus opening up the possibility of the invention – the advent or 'in-coming' (*invenire*) – of what has yet to be thought. As Derrida writes: [...]

For a deconstructive operation possibility would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible: that is, [...] of the other – the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible, in other words, of the only possible invention.⁵²

The only invention faithful to the conditions of possibility (Otherness, excess) must be an invention of impossibility, of irony. As I've said, no irony can be ironic without its allegorical 'content' and this is further borne out in Derrida's thoughts on invention: the work done, of misreading, tendering, in the name of a certain impossibility, relies as irony does on allegory, on the economy of the possible – that which has become convention, rule and method. In a sense the "instituting moment" – the moment of decision, the flex of irony into allegory – is the crucial moment in deconstruction in which the tension of a limit or border, between the possible and impossible, reveals a thematics of irony and aporia. This instituting moment is violent, in a way, since it has "no guarantee": it is a rupture, a newness and risk that is violent because it is "guaranteed by no previous rules" and cannot be anticipated.⁵³ This is, of course, the risk and contingency of irony. But, effects of irony are not produced *ex nihilo*, and as such, any risk of violence an ironist like Derrida may enact on norms, rules and conventions, is done by practicing and respecting them closely.⁵⁴

An invention, then, for Derrida, is never seen as such until it is subsumed within convention (ever heard of an invention you haven't heard of?), and when it is, like the mark, word or signature, able to be repeated, utilized and engaged within certain contexts. So, strictly speaking, even the most private irony cannot be ironic until it is repeated, and thus, is no longer solely private. This is because for an invention to be an invention it must first be susceptible to repetition, re-inscription, exploitation, generality – common availability, as Rudolf Gasché has pointed out, and this holds true for irony itself.⁵⁵ As Gasché says, singularities, inventions, fantasies, private ironies "must in their very singularity already be inhabited by generality, by the public, otherwise they would not be recognizable, that is, intelligible as what they are"

⁵² See *Arguing with Derrida*. (p.133).

⁵³ See John D. Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. 1997. p.6. [Hereafter referred to as *DN*]

⁵⁴ A paradox (or irony) inheres here, since, in order to break with the norm/rule and invent a new norm/rule, you have to follow (or iterate) to some degree the old norm/rule. As Derrida says "[t]here is no responsibility, no decision, without this inauguration, this absolute break. That is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension of memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break" (*DN*,6).

⁵⁵ See Rudolf Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. 1994. pp.9-10. [Hereafter, *ID*]

(*ID*, 15). The singular is always already contaminated by the Other (this holds true for the subject also as we could not perceive who we ‘are’ were it not for the Other’s *Otherness* to us). Thus, there is always some degree of misprision involved in any statement or correlation of irony with perspectivism, relativism, and the contention that ‘anything goes’ in the so-called world of postmodern interpretation. What deconstruction attempts to do, and this is also what I argue DeLillo attempts to perform in his texts, is to expose the process to allegory, revealing the cognitions and equivalences, substitutions and combinations, metonyms and metaphors that are always involved in the translation of Otherness into conceptuality. In this way deconstruction repeats all that it critiques. As a discourse it inheres in context, within the texts it examines. At the same time, however, and through this repetition, a deconstruction uncovers the law of *différance* (irony) at the core of textuality and language, and because it is faithful to this, is ethical in its regard for the very possibilities of repetition and reading, proposes something new, a “break”, an invention, a new work. The difficulties of “deconstruction” can, in a sense, be explained when we consider that what it is attempting amounts to a translation of translation.

It is on the question of invention in Derrida’s essay: “Psyche: Inventions of the Other”⁵⁶ that the issue of irony and the work of Derrida’s deconstruction returns to the work of de Man. In “Psyche” the idea of invention is linked to the tension and relationship between allegory and irony. “Truth and deceit” are taken as the parameters for Derrida’s reading of de Man’s work and theory of allegory, and become the orienting concerns of a ‘theory’ of invention that, as I’ve said, in effect, offers us also a theory of irony, and, through the example of Francis Ponge’s poem “Fable”, a ‘theory’ of the *work* of irony in the work of art.⁵⁷ Through Ponge’s

⁵⁶ See this essay in *Reading De Man Reading*. [Hereafter *RDR*]

⁵⁷ “Fable”

*By the word by commences then this
text
Of which the first line states the truth
But this silvering under the one and
other
Can it be tolerated?
Dear reader already you judge
There as to our difficulties ...*

(AFTER seven years of misfortune
she broke the mirror.)

“Fable” Derrida shows us how the interaction of irony and allegory becomes adequate to the “truth” of truth, and truth as invention. Derrida explains the significance of the poem, what it is ‘about’, if you like, when he writes how,

Fable tells of allegory, of one word’s move to cross over to the other, to the other side of the mirror. Of the desperate effort of an unhappy speech to move beyond the specularly that constitutes itself. We might say that *Fable* puts *into action* the question of reference, of the specularly of language *or* of literature, and of the possibility of stating the other or speaking *to* the other. (*RDR*, 31)

In effect Ponge’s poem asks its reader if a mirror (*psyche* is French for a type of mirror) theory of language, a mimetic theory lacking a relation to Otherness, can be “tolerated”. The poem, a reflection on the prison-house of allegory, breaks the mirror (as in the narrative epoché that ruptures the poem) of its own illusion by the ironisation or ruination of its own allegoricity (its pretensions as a fable), revealing as it does so what Derrida sees as an allegory of truth, and the truth of truth as always allegorical, always an invention. For our own purposes the poem reveals the truth content of the work of art consistent to the language philosophy of DeLillo and de Man. Truth, as it turns out, is subject to irony; for it to be ‘truthful’, an instance of the truth needs to undergo the mortification characteristic of the ironisation of allegory. Derrida spells this out when he writes:

I wish to dedicate this reading to Paul de Man because of the resemblance Ponge’s fable, bespeaking a unique intersection of irony and allegory, bears to a poem of truth. It presents itself ironically as an allegory ‘of which the first line states the truth’: the truth of allegory and allegory of truth, truth as allegory. Both are fabulous inventions, by which we mean inventions of language (at the root of fable/fabulous is *fari* or *phanai*: to speak) as the invention of language as the same and the other, of oneself as (of) the other. (31)

Such a poem of truth is what DeLillo aims for also in his own texts that insist on the invention of the self, like the work of art, “as (of) the other”, to ironise allegory as both “same and other” and, thus, tender. Where we find truth, we might say, is in the intersection of irony and allegory. To present “ironically as an allegory” is to present the truth of allegory and thus, the truth of truth, since truth is allegorical, truth is always (“as an allegory”) a fable. “Fable” is a performance that confronts itself, and this is why it is able to articulate what is ‘true’ of literature and rhetorical language, as well as deconstruction. Thus, in the Demanic scheme Derrida defers to here, what is true of language is what is true of truth. As de Man himself has said:

All language is language about denomination, that is, a conceptual, figural, metaphorical language. ... If all language is about language, then the paradigmatic linguistic model is that of an entity that confronts itself. (*RDR*, 34)

Thus, language is “about” naming, about the drama of allegorization, which means that, because allegory is, as I’m suggesting, an aspect or imperative of irony, for a certain use of language to be truthful, it must be a use that confronts itself. All faithful articulations of Otherness, must, thus, proceed from the ironic and faithful mortification of the specular illusion of allegorical coincidence. To know an irony is to have an allegory, but a “true” allegory is only one that has been ironised. The significance of Ponge’s “Fable” is that it reveals, through the notion of “truth”, the *work* of irony in allegory and in language. Moreover, as an artwork, it reveals also what I shall soon qualify as the *work* of art DeLillo appears to subscribe to with his own texts. “Fable” thus represents, as Derrida sees it, “an allegory stating ironically the truth of all allegory [...]” (38). Which is to say, that all allegories are composed by an Otherness, in irony, that no allegory or language can merely reflect. Here, in a text written by Derrida on de Man and on, among other things, allegory and irony, invention, deconstruction itself as revealed through Ponge’s poem, and on the demand constantly iterated throughout deconstruction for the most ethical tendering of Otherness, we find the force of irony, albeit, tendered within a text seemingly on allegory.

Because “Fable” presents the irony of its allegory it is thus true to the economy of *différance*, the trace⁵⁸, iteration and the economic considerations of tenderness. As a work of art, “Fable”, in effect, tenders itself, tendering allegory in the name of truth, which means its allegories have been made tender by irony. We can say it is irony that is Derrida’s true subject since irony is what “demystifies” allegory (de Man) and in so doing, offers the truth of the “truth” that is always allegorical. Thus, with irony in mind, perhaps, Derrida once again points out the inextricable association of ironic invention and allegoricity:

Ponge’s Fable, however inventive it may be, and in order to be so, is like any fable in that it calls for linguistic rules, social modes of reading, and reception, stabilized competences, a historical configuration of the poetic domain and of literary tradition, and so forth. (*RDR*, 44)

Irony, for it to be ironic, depends on allegory and the contexts, rules, modes and competences it is invented from. Ponge’s poem is thus a fable (or allegory) for irony

⁵⁸ The trace is a sort of Derridean revision of the sign, revised so as to signify that the sign is composed in and of Otherness. The sign, as trace, is at once the appearance of a trace of this Otherness, and at the same time the mournful trace of all that vanishes or disappears from the trace in the moment of its appearance – all, we might say, that from the translation of Otherness into the sign, falls back into Otherness, and memory, all that is different and has been deferred. In the trace Derrida insists on the structure of the symbolic economy as *différance*.

and invention, but also for deconstruction in so far as it discloses the allegoricity of allegory, as well as the becoming-allegorical of all deconstruction, all irony and invention. The reason why Derrida can refer to it as a poem of truth is that it deconstructs (reveals the irony of understanding) the very process of allegorization – of tropological cognitions – it is itself, inevitably and unavoidably, also an instance of. As such there is never the invention of truth as such, but rather the invention of “truth as proposition” (*RDR*, 51).

What we call deconstruction, then, is that which names a profound respect and faithfulness to the “poetics”, economy, and laws of what it critiques by never stepping outside these laws, never introducing arbitrary ‘stopping points’ or transcendental truths. Deconstruction must be subject to itself (just as Ponge’s poem is), and in speaking of the allegorical economy of signs it must show that all speech of, and about, allegory is itself allegorical. Deconstruction (that “merging of chance and necessity”⁵⁹) is a fable, a “fabulous invention” about the truth. Deconstruction thus observes that Otherness is the *always* and *already* of the economy, and that it is this Otherness – articulated through irony – that enables the subject of the economy the possibility of satisfying its need for presence, stability and assent. Ponge’s “Fable” is a fable (an allegory) of impossibility, an allegory of deconstruction. Thus, the poem resembles an allegory of irony, as an example of a tender allegory – one that reveals the *work* of art and the relation of its condition to its reproducibility (*différance*). Again, in apparently speaking of the work of another writer, Derrida is also speaking of his own practice, since the above is what he himself repeats through his deconstruction and critique of reflection and specular philosophy; deconstruction, to this end, is always presenting allegories of the ‘becoming-allegorical’ force that qualifies the subject’s experience of being-in-language. What this means is that Derrida’s texts must always be acts of irony. DeLillo, too, sets his texts to recognise Otherness in the mirror (psyche) of language.

All of this tendering of allegory in the name of the Other, articulated, however, through allegory nonetheless, brings us back again to a certain irony or double bind:

⁵⁹ As Derrida says:

The very moment of this fabulous repetition can, through a merging of chance and necessity, produce the new event [...] by bending the rules with respect for the rules themselves in order to allow for the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of this dehiscence. That is perhaps what we call deconstruction. (*RDR*, 59)

the irony of the ethical raised in the issue of representing the unrepresentable, tendering the impossible. Simon Critchley responds to this issue when he asks

[...] if ethics is defined in terms of respect for alterity, how is alterity respected in a discourse upon that alterity? Is not a book on ethics a denial of ethics, and must not ethics be a denial of the book?⁶⁰

What we shall see is that allegories are ethical in as far as they are ‘true’ allegories, which is to say, allegories that have been ironized. The ethical allegory (for all ethical statements are allegories) will be that which bears the countersignature of the Other and is written in irony. As we shall soon see, what is involved here is the balancing of a respect for alterity with the necessity to name; this is the paradox, or irony, that Derrida sees as the *work* of mourning.

(v) The Tenderness of Mourning

In simple terms, mourning, as Derrida configures it, is an expression of the loss that, as I’ve often said, is the essential and constituting experience of being-in-language; this loss tenders language (calls for names) in the same gesture that it marks the tenderness (contingent and fallen qualities) of language as well. This doubleness, essentially the feature of irony is, as Paul de Man and Derrida see it, what keeps the economy of language ‘going’, iterating. Derrida’s mourning is a formulation that recognises this ironic structure, and, in doing so (and this is why it is ‘deconstructive’) recognises its own tenderness as a formulation; mourning is, as Derrida conceives of it, impossible. This understanding however, in typically Derridean fashion, is what makes mourning a more ethical and faithful articulation of what is a dilemma for faith and ethics – the issue posed by the necessity of representing the Other. What I refer to as the ‘tenderness of mourning’ is a consequence of the fact that mourning is structured as an irony (as an impossibility); all claims to the ethical and to notions of good-faith representation that may then be associated with Derridean mourning, spring from this ironic structure. Mourning, we might say, is *the* ironic formulation of late Derridean deconstruction *because*, more than any of Derrida’s other ‘formulations’, mourning assumes the tendering of Otherness as its *raison d’être*. In a sense, Derrida’s mourning (a relatively late formulation in his career) represents a condensation of all his previous texts in so far as it foregrounds and tenders in the

⁶⁰ See Critchley. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. 1992. p.12.

most economical and most focussed way the demand of tendering Otherness that has always been Derrida's constant concern. *Memoires for Paul de Man*,⁶¹ is a text that makes clear the tenderness of mourning, the tenderness of one's (Derrida's) memories of a bereaved Other (de Man), of one's relation to Otherness and memory on the larger scale, and the tenderness of 'deconstruction'; *Memoires* is also a text about the tender-theory at the core of Derrida's memory of de Man's work, the relationship between allegory and irony – the relationship constitutive of mourning itself, in this regard it is crucial that Derrida goes so far as to spell out the relationship of irony to all this. In Derrida's words: "together (allegory and irony) they form the rhetoric of memory" (*M*, 81). With my own and, I argue, DeLillo's conjugating of memory and Otherness in mind, we might add here that irony proper (allegory and irony together) is what forms the "rhetoric" of Otherness.

The question of mourning in deconstruction is always connected to the question of writing and, specifically (in texts such as *Memoires for Paul de Man*, *The Work of Mourning*, *Spectres of Marx*) of writing about the dead Other. Of course, this is a personal issue for Derrida, and he is loath to systematize or generalize his mourning since, commonly, the instance for his work on mourning has been the death of a friend (de Man, Lyotard, Levinas, and Foucault are examples); but what emerges as the paradox, or irony, of writing of the dead (and let's remember in writing about Plato, Nietzsche, or Heidegger, Derrida has always been speaking with the dead) is the aporia that mourning, in general, designates: not wishing to write, incorporate and thus disrespect the Otherness of the deceased, but also not being prepared to leave the Other alone and silent in their alterity by not writing or speaking of them. Derrida elaborates this double-headed structure of mourning as the difference between what he calls possible and impossible mourning. "Possible mourning" is seen as the interiorization within ourselves as image, ideal or idol, the Other who is dead and only lives in us. "Impossible mourning" leaves the Other their alterity, and is therefore that mourning which refuses the subject the possibility of taking the Other within oneself, within one's narcissism. Derrida asks us which is the "most unjust betrayal?" (*Mem*, 6): one is of memory, the other, of forgetting, but neither option will be meaningful if not for the economic necessity of their contamination of each other. It is the insistence

⁶¹ See Derrida. *Memoires for Paul de Man* (trans. Cecile Lindsay; Jonathan Culler; Eduardo Cadava; Peggy Kamuf). 1989. [Hereafter *Mem*.]

on this contamination, something that occurs in the gap both forms expose – the site of Otherness – that qualifies mourning as an ironic “structure”.

Simply put, this is the sort of aporia that mourning, as Derrida refers to it, designates, the gap opened between what we might call the representation of Otherness and the Othering of representation. As Derrida has pointed out, for mourning to succeed it must fail: it must fail to incorporate the Other, to make what is absent present in the sign, but just as urgently, mourning must also fail *not* to write “in the name of” or “in memory of” and in so doing repeat the loss of the Other all over again. Hence, mourning becomes for Derrida the frame in which to consider questions of faith and ethics as they relate to the demand to represent Otherness as Other without falling into silence, passivity, or apathy. There is no resolution in Derridean mourning, rather, what we are left with is what we could think of as a continual process of translation organised around a resistance that, perhaps in the manner of desire, calls forth the continual work of negotiation and tender, calling forth more or less tender allegories. As a consequence of this no final consolation or completion can be attained, but in the necessary and successful failure of mourning we are given a vision of language and subjectivity, in irony, as related forms of tenderness, and as tender to an economy of mourning – an economy of irony in which the possible (names, allegory etc) is reliant on impossibility (Otherness).

The pairing of the allegorical and the ironic, as I have indicated it, subsumed as a relationship within the force of irony, thus emerges as a relationship – of contamination, dependence, necessity and economy – expressive of a certain ironic “infrastructure” within deconstruction. As such, the ironic relationship models other relationships – narcissism and Otherness, memory and forgetting, repetition and loss – crucial to the articulation of deconstruction. The Other, as Other, is untouchable and is always in a sense, beyond us; as we have seen in relation to invention, the Other is impossible, an excess, though this is what gives meaning to mourning and makes it ironic.⁶²

Ironically, it is only through this failure to fully recollect the Other that we “succeed” in mourning the Other as Other. For Derrida, then, the “il y a,” the rest, the excess, is only “there” for us as the loss that calls us to mourning. But as a “loss,” the remains are not there for us. There is always an allegorical dimension to mourning. And, therefore, “true” mourning is itself

⁶² The use of this word “beyond” here needs some attention since the Other is not beyond us in a transcendental sense; rather, this beyond is what we are inescapably “in”. This is to say that language, philosophy, concepts etc., in coming from the Other, are thus *of* this “beyond”, which, nevertheless, philosophy can never “fully recollect” or represent. The way in which language reveals itself as constituent of this Otherness is via the economy of *différance*, but also, I must add, via irony.

impossible. Yet the trace of the Other remains in the act of mourning. It is in mourning, then, that we remember the remains. But ironically, it is the very failure of mourning as mimetic interiorization that allows us to attempt fidelity to the remains. The inevitable failure of memory to enclose the Other, opens us to the “beyond”.⁶³

When Drucilla Cornell says (in the above) that “true mourning is itself impossible” because it always involves an “allegorical dimension”, we ought also to read this as a statement about the impossibility of irony; irony will always fall into the allegorical dimension. Mourning depends, then, on its failure, on its disappointment, or what Derrida refers to as a “tender rejection” (*Mem*, 35) of allegory.

What qualifies mourning’s “tender rejection” is, however, irony itself, albeit, the form of irony carried within Derrida’s definition of allegory as the “possibility that permits language to say the other and to speak of itself while speaking of something else; the possibility of always saying something other than what it gives to be read, including the scene of reading itself” (*Mem*, 11). In seemingly deferring to allegory, Derrida is ironically slipping us an allegory of irony, specifically an allegory that contains the knowledge that we can only indicate the beyond (the excess) allegorically. Derrida is here repeating, or remembering, de Man in his own suggestive tendering of allegory and irony, recalling as he writes that “I have [...] always thought that de Man smiled to himself when he spoke of the narrative structure of allegory, as if he were secretly slipping us a definition of narration that is at once ironic and allegorical [...]” (*Mem*, 11).⁶⁴

Derrida’s formulation of mourning thus offers us a way of recognising that all concepts, all naming, and all memories have written within them the possibility of irony. In terms more appropriate to a language of mourning, this recognition of irony is like the recognition of a form of death comported within the sign, a death in which is built the moment of naming. Mourning, thus conceived, recalls that death or

⁶³ See Drucilla Cornell. *The Philosophy of the Limit*. 1992 (p.73) [Hereafter *PL*]

⁶⁴ With this in mind it is possible to see in Derrida’s work, the prevalence of the ironic countersignature signed by Derrida in allegory. In quoting de Man Derrida appears to begin a kind of concession to irony:

Paul de Man is bent on demonstrating ‘the implicit and rather enigmatic link’ for allegory and irony; we have already glimpsed it for synecdoche, prosopopeia, or parabasis. Irony too is a figure of disjunction, duplication, and doubling. It often produces a disjunction by which ‘a purely linguistic subject replaces the original self’, according to the scheme of amnesic memory of which we have spoken. And yet, precisely because of the disjunctive structure that they share, allegory and irony draw between them this singular contract, and each recalls the other. Of course, the former is essentially narrative, the latter momentary and pointed, but together they form, in fact, the rhetoric of memory which recalls, recounts, forgets, recounts, and recalls forgetting, referring to the past only to efface what is essential to it: anteriority. (*Mem.*, 81)

finitude is the condition for all meaning and effects of sense and subjectivity. Irony is, in this regard, the ‘trope’ of death.⁶⁵ What is true of the sign is also true for the subject; for both, the moment of death or irony articulates their status as tender sign or subject: “[d]eath constitutes and makes manifest the limits of a *me* or an *us* who are obliged to harbor something that is greater and other than them; something *outside of them within them*” (*Mem*, 34). Death presents the conditions for the ethical in highlighting the difference between same and Other, placing into relief the tenderness of “me” and “us”. In this way, a work of art (like Ponge’s) that mortifies (gives death to) its own appearance or representation – its own allegoricity – is one that tenders both the economical imperatives of language as well as Otherness through the reproduction of its structural affinities with irony and death. Moreover, in the work of art, thus conceived, we find a faithful reproduction of the condition of subjectivity – the truth of subjectivity as a condition explained through Derrida’s mourning, where

The ‘me’ or the ‘us’ of which we speak then arise and are delimited in the way that they are only through this experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other. This terrible solitude which is mine or ours at the death of the other is what constitutes that relationship to the self which we call ‘me,’ ‘us,’ ‘between us,’ ‘subjectivity,’ ‘intersubjectivity,’ ‘memory.’ The *possibility* of death ‘happens,’ so to speak, ‘before’ these different instances, and makes them possible. Or, more precisely, the possibility of the death of the other *as* mine or ours in-forms any relation to the other and the finitude of memory. (*Mem*, 33)

The experience of the self – of a “me” or “us” – is as it is because of the Other that is beyond us, in excess of us. But we are never so aware of this (of our “us-ness”, our “me-ness”) as when another dies. Through the death of another person we are made aware – via the possibilities and impossibilities of mourning – of our relation to the Other, and, thus, are made aware of ourselves, of the nature of our “us”-ness and of the finitude of our own memories (allegories). The death of the other offers an ironic experience that draws attention to the tenderness of our sense of self as well as the tenderness of language – which is to say, then, combining these two notions – the tenderness of being a subject. The *work* of mourning can, thus, be seen to enable the thought of the ethical because it radically ironises the entire infrastructure of subjectivity – language, representation, relationships, perception and apperception. What is important about such a consideration of irony, here formulated as mourning, is that it describes the necessary work required for faithful and ethical reproduction –

⁶⁵ Incidentally, this association of irony and death explains why it is that I can refer to DeLillo’s novels of memory as works of mourning. Moreover, the link between irony and death is something I return to in my chapter on *Underworld*, specifically in my discussion of Bruegel’s painting “The Triumph of Death”.

precisely the *work* of the artist in a DeLillo novel. A faithful artwork will be one that rehearses its death as part of its *work*. In all of this, the demand to continue with language, in light of the Other, in the most accurate, clear, compassionate and tender way, is still the greatest demand of subjectivity, is, in fact as DeLillo suggests through his novels, a form of faith. Indeed, this is a faith qualified, as we will see in my discussion of *The Body Artist*, by a debt to Otherness revealed through an artist's attention to *différance*, or what Derrida, I argue, refers to as the "ironic moment [...] sealed in the body of an allegorical writing" (*Mem*, 84).

Chapter 2: *The Body Artist*

(i) The Fallen Wonder of the World

By virtue of his subtly metafictional *legerdemain* DeLillo's *The Body Artist*, I argue, is to be read as a text composed, in the manner of the Proustian *mémoire involontaire*,⁶⁶ within the memories of its artist and 'author' Lauren Hartke; the text is a return or replay, certainly a remembering, of her experiences of trauma and mourning occasioned by the suicide of her husband, Rey Robles. The experience of this trauma is, as I argue it, an experience of radical Otherness. What is significant about this is that, as a record of an artist's hosting of Otherness (an experience, as we shall soon see, embodied in the figure, Mr. Tuttle), *The Body Artist* becomes a record of the *work* entailed in the production of a work of art. Such *work*, what I have referred to previously as the work of mourning (a working with irony), is, as I read it, revealed as crucial to the distinction of the faithful and ethical artwork; this is an art form that, for DeLillo, I argue, is qualified by an artist's 'deconstruction' of ideological or allegorical reality, a mortification of language, and an examination of all that is assumed in representation and reproduction. Such work, as I refer to it, performed by Lauren, is to the purpose of what, in Chapter One of this thesis I have indicated are the ethical and impossible demands of mourning – the respecting of the unrepresentable Other, combined with the all too human necessity of representing Otherness.⁶⁷

Central to Lauren's work of mourning is the figure Tuttle whose manifestation to Lauren is like a "daydream variation" (14), an experience likened to that of imagining one's way into a story in a newspaper before being aware one is doing it (14); Tuttle,

⁶⁶ See Handelman: "[A] memory which reaches to an archaic, almost transpersonal level [...] a nonsubjective memory, emanating from a realm other than active personal cognition or chronological narrations of past events [...] this involuntary memory is released in a sudden moment of recognition from an encounter with an object" (*FR*, 152).

⁶⁷ Such an examination of the processes involved in the *work* of art, as true of Lauren's performance *Body Time* as it is for the novel itself, is nothing short of a complete examination of the philosophical underpinnings of language and writing. As such, *The Body Artist* ought to be read in the context of one of DeLillo's complaints about the usual readings his texts receive: "what's almost never discussed is [...] the language in which a book is framed" says DeLillo, "one receives a broad analysis of, perhaps, the social issues in one's work but rarely anything about the way the writer gets there". [Quoted by Philip Nel in "Don DeLillo's Return to Form: The Modernist Poetics of *The Body Artist*", p.736.] Indeed, this thesis, an examination of the relationship of allegory and irony in what I call irony proper, is designed to disclose how DeLillo's texts "get" to present their "social issues" through an examination of the philosophy of language proposed in this thesis.

we might consider, ‘represents’ something like the unrepresentable delay prior to cognition. Another way to think of Tuttle is as the foreign hair (usually called a “foreign body”) Lauren picks from her mouth in the opening scene of the novel: the hair itself, perhaps, can be seen to stand in for Otherness, though it is more accurate to see Tuttle as the ghosted return (and hence, delayed) sensation – the “complicated sense memory of someone else’s hair” (11) – of this Otherness as it returns and is repeated through something like body-memory. Tuttle himself is not what I would call the Other in the text, but is more properly an effect of Otherness, in particular, an effect of the radical undoing of Lauren’s allegories of being, time and space caused by her traumatic exposure to Otherness.⁶⁸ In effect, Tuttle is the unmediated return or repetition of this Otherness that, throughout the text, Lauren ‘comes to terms’ with – that is to say, translates, mediates and represents. As such, Tuttle is the delay – the very irony or *différance* of which I have been speaking – prior to allegory and representation, that we can think of as ‘origin’ to writing and the whole economy of the sign. Tuttle, as something Lauren’s body recovers or remembers of Otherness, and as an articulation of Otherness that mortifies Lauren’s ontological and epistemological regimes of time, space and language, “represents” knowledge before knowing, memory before remembering, time before allegory.⁶⁹

In a text that signals in its title that it is ‘about’ an artist, all of what DeLillo will present as definitive of that appellation rests on Lauren’s relationship to this “impossible man” (58), this irony incarnate, Tuttle. Through Lauren’s relationship with Tuttle, and her reproduction of him in her performance piece *Body Time*, DeLillo makes an argument about the ethical demands necessary to the *work* of art. In the process of this argument DeLillo, *qua* Lauren, ‘deconstructs’ all the usual assumptions pertaining to allegory, representation, language and subjectivity. In a sense, Tuttle defines Lauren as an artist since his presence in the text is attributable to her openness to Otherness, her capacity to tender the impossible, her “hyperpreparedness” (16) for what she doesn’t yet know. Tuttle, we could say, is

⁶⁸ For the best reading of Tuttle’s significance and ‘status’ in the novel see Laura Di Prete’s “Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*: Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma” [*Contemporary Literature*, Fall 2005, Vol 46, #3] where she accounts for him as a “staging of traumatic reenactment” (484). My own chapter, originally written in 2002, shares many of Di Prete’s assumptions, but differs in its focus on irony, *différance*, language and the work of art.

⁶⁹ Examples of this can be found littered throughout the text. See: “She got up to get something [...] She knew it would come to her because it always did and then it did” (16); “But when he wasn’t there she knew he wouldn’t be, if that makes sense” (96).

produced or created by Lauren's body (what we'd expect of a body artist) in a manner similar to the way in which her body still senses or experiences the presence of the hair on her tongue after it has been removed; in this regard, Tuttle is the body's ghosting of Rey and Otherness, conducted through her senses in a way that is more faithful to the experience of Otherness because it is 'represented' through a medium (her body) other than that of language or consciousness.⁷⁰ Lauren's qualities as an artist are thus a consequence of her qualities as host to Tuttle.⁷¹

The arrival of Tuttle is, we might say, an epiphenomenon of the moment at which the symbolic world (the world, rendered in language, of ideology, or what Lauren refers to as "myth" (98)) all falls away. Tuttle, we *could* say, is an emissary, a revenant or (more popularly) "ghost,"⁷² of the real who, in the language of deconstruction, presents to Lauren the Otherness of time – as pure exteriority or alterity – to the experience of being and subjectivity. Thus, Tuttle is described as violating "the limits of the human" (100), as an evocation of Lauren's traumatic experience of Otherness, the "howling face, the stark, the not-as-if of things" (90), and as "the thing you know nothing about" (99). This last phrase is a description apt for all the things Tuttle, as a figure of prosopopoeia constellates: the body, the Other, and time. Through Lauren's engagement with irony and *différance*, embodied in Tuttle, Lauren is able to faithfully translate the trauma of Otherness into the *work* of art, an art form, characterised by what I have previously referred to as the mourning of the Other – an ethical art consequential to an artist's work with irony – that in DeLillo's novels, reads as a blueprint for the tender poststructural artwork. As such, *The Body Artist* is primarily about the process of translating Otherness into allegory.

The question of the ethical is raised by the consideration of how, faced with the Other and knowing ourselves to be constituents of an immanent Otherness, we use language and make representations faithful to this Otherness. In the novel the

⁷⁰ The notion of the body as medium of Otherness is something that, in effect, Handelman points out: "The body itself is a paradigmatic example of an exteriority not constituted by my consciousness; it permanently contests the prerogatives of consciousness to 'give meaning'" (FR, 253). The body introduces an aporia into the self-relation; suggesting the difference within self, the subject cannot be identical to itself because of its "exposure, vulnerability, passivity" – as an "other-in-the-same" (FR, 253).

⁷¹ By "host" I refer to the two obvious readings of this term offered in the novel: firstly, Lauren as Tuttle's host when he appears as an uninvited guest in her house, and secondly, Lauren as body-host to the series of memories, impressions, sensations, intuitions that comprise Tuttle, housed in Lauren's body.

⁷² Indeed, in later editions of *The Body Artist* a tag line referring to the text as a "postmodern ghost story" has become part of the marketing of the novel.

possibility of the ethical is expressed by such considerations as how much we permit Otherness to act on our interpretations, and how much of this Otherness we translate into our representations. Moreover, Lauren's questions about mourning: "why shouldn't the death of a person you love bring you into lurid ruin?" and "why should you accommodate his death?" (116) present the reader with a way of bringing into focus the issue of mourning with the more epistemological and ontological questions the text asks of us: "[i]s reality too powerful for you?" (122) and "how much myth do we build into our experience of time?" (98). These questions are what Lauren in *The Body Artist* undertakes to answer; in doing so Lauren provides the reader with a theory of art that DeLillo, I suggest, could well endorse as his own theory of the novel.⁷³

The rest of this chapter is divided into three parts: the first takes up the motif of the fall as mentioned in the preceding chapters, in furtherment of certain assumptions about language DeLillo appears to maintain, and develops these assumptions in relation to a notion of allegoricity built around perhaps the single most crucial qualifying term of the text – the equivocal ontological category, "seems". In the second part of this chapter I use the character Mr. Tuttle to explore issues pertaining to the treatment of time and the Other in the novel. In the final section of this chapter I seek to make some qualifying remarks about what, with *The Body Artist*, I think DeLillo offers the reader as the 'work of art'.

(ii) Time *seems* to pass.

You know more surely who you are on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. (7)

As a parable of Lauren's experience of Rey's death, the "storm" of trauma and the "bright day" of heightened self-consciousness that follows it, both of which are assumed within the experience of Otherness, represent the knowledge gained by

⁷³ In answering these questions in this chapter we also construct a bridge between the theory chapter (Chapter One) and the *Underworld* chapter (Chapter Three) – a 'bridge' that provides the reader with the set of assumptions and the philosophical vocabulary with which to read the rest of the thesis. This is why I place discussion of *The Body Artist* (2001), before my discussion of *Underworld* (1998). I would add that this is a 'reading' justified by a text such as *The Body Artist* that is itself a study of the exigencies and assumptions involved in the *work* of irony towards the work of art, and, at the same time, an exposition of DeLillo's great themes, language, subjectivity, memory, time and Otherness.

Lauren of the fallenness of the human condition, our being-in-language.⁷⁴ The “falling leaf” is a metaphor for Lauren’s fall into self-awareness,⁷⁵ a fall entirely commensurate with both her exposure to Otherness and the undoing, or ironising, of all her perceptual and representational assumptions consequent to this exposure. As I have suggested, it is a statement about her qualities as an artist that Lauren allows herself as open an experience of this fall as she does; as well as she “can” Lauren allows this Otherness to express itself, and much of what constitutes her work in the text resembles a kind of ‘book-keeping’ of her responsibilities and tendencies involved in the inevitability of her representation and mediation of this Otherness.⁷⁶ The series of misprisions, misperceptions, and mistranslations that, as Lauren (and DeLillo) is aware, constitute our “grip” on the world, are, in good faith, forestalled, by Lauren, their passage into repression, forgetting and paranoia. Moreover, such misrepresentations become the reason Lauren, as the closing pages of her narrative suggest, returns to the fallen condition of allegoricity. Importantly, DeLillo appears to be saying, it takes imagination, a process of tendering, and art to manage this translation of Otherness into allegory, and essentially, this is the “point” of *The Body Artist*. In the mourning of her husband that structures the text we find, in Lauren the artist, also that mourning located in the *work* of deconstruction – a process premised on the impossible balancing of alterity and representation, the impossible *work* of maintaining both the ironisation of allegoricity and, at the same time, a commitment to the allegorisation of alterity’s articulation through irony.

The text, a composition often resembling a record or diary of an artist’s *work* towards the making of a certain representation, reveals Lauren’s thoughts on representation and Otherness, and throughout the text we (the reader) find instances of what we can refer to as fallen representation, that is to say, allegories exposed to irony; commonly, images, perceptions, sensations, and phrases are recorded by Lauren both for what they propose *and* for what they miss. In a sense, the artist’s

⁷⁴ Ostensibly, it is Rey’s suicide that is the occasion of the “fall” in the text. Connected to this fall, however, because it is a fall experienced and ‘represented’ by an artist (Lauren), is also the sense discussed in the preceding chapters of the human fall into language from the impossible Otherness of the world. Moreover, the trauma of Rey’s death serves as a reminder of the repeated trauma of signification – the non-coincidence, absence or loss harboured within the sign itself, that constitutes and continually renews the economy of language.

⁷⁵ In fact, this is precisely, the fall of the self into language-consciousness that, for de Man, is definitive of the ironist.

⁷⁶ Notably, in her first meeting with Tuttle Lauren recognises that he is “inevitable” (41); essentially his appearance is inseparable from Lauren’s powers of representation.

mourning is conducted through the mortification of her allegories. Thus, a man Lauren observes “sitting on his porch [...] arms spread, a broad-faced blondish man, lounging”, a man who Lauren sees “complete”: “[a] lazy and manipulative man, in real estate [...] divorced and drink haunted” (70) is, moments later, revealed to be nothing more than

a paint can placed on a board that was balanced between two chairs. The white and yellow can was his face, the board was his arms and the mind and heart of the man were in the air somewhere, already lost in the voice of the news reader on the radio. (70)

In effect, the paint-can man is eidetically painted by Lauren’s imagination in such a way as to suggest her sensitivity to language. It is as if the word “paint” prompts Lauren’s ‘painting’ of the man, the information on the radio providing the biographical details. In this moment of translation we are presented with both an image (an allegorical construction) as well as the deconstruction of the artist’s perceptual tendencies. Later in the text a “dead squirrel” in Lauren’s driveway is revealed as a “strip of curled burlap” (111) and later still, after her reproduction of her Japanese neighbour in her performance piece, Lauren sees the Japanese woman again and notes how “[h]er hands were fisted up inside the sleeves of her jacket” (115), a detail Lauren “curse[s] herself for not having thought of for the piece [...] it was everything she needed to know about the woman” (115). The point, it would appear, is that Lauren’s unreliability as a narrator is not repressed, but is, in fact, a credential of her responsibility as narrator; as an artist her misperceptions – the tenderness of her allegories, we might say – become a feature of her ethical regard for Otherness, for things, and for allegory, seen in the very tenderness of her tendering of both allegories and things (Others). In her acts of allegory and representation, what Lauren is also reproducing is the permissibility of allegorical deconstruction, of the *work* of irony within her allegories; thus, we are witness to the way the word “paint” can tender its verb (to paint, as Lauren does) and, in another way, we are made witness to the re-arrangement of spatial units of meaning (the paint can, board, etc.) to the purpose of constructing a difference (the “blondish” man).

To present in the act of representation or reproduction the very force, or possibility, of reproduction in such a way, is to ‘present’ the unrepresentable of irony or *différance*⁷⁷ and, thus, to open representation, as much as possible, to the articulation

⁷⁷ The ‘presentation’ of such *différance* is what we might think of as the presentation of that which has no content, but is rather the delay or difference between forms of content, allegories, from which content is made distinct

of Otherness. This, for DeLillo, as I will continue to argue, appears to be exactly the sort of disclosure (or tendering) DeLillo, *qua* Lauren, understands as the *work* (the demand and responsibility) of the artist, a sort of definition too of the work of art. Such an understanding, essentially that of *différance* and irony at work in the artist's perceptions and representations, is what the following quote appears to provide:

You stand at the table shuffling papers and you drop something. Only you don't know it. It takes a second or two before you know it and even then you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body. But once you know you've dropped something, you hear it hit the floor, belatedly. The sound makes its way through an immense web of distances. You hear the thing fall and know what it is at the same time, more or less, and it's a paperclip. You know this from the sound it makes when it hits the floor and from the retrieved memory of the drop itself, the thing falling from your hand or slipping off the edge of the page. Now that you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, or sort of see it maybe, or something else. The paperclip hits the floor with an end-to-end bounce, faint and weightless, a sound for which there is no imitative word, the sound of a paperclip falling, but when you bend to pick it up, it isn't there. (89)

All of that which we represent, all 'knowing', all allegories, all effects of identity, as in this example, are produced in the delay from, and difference to, the actual event. The event itself, even the self-consciously prosaic event of the fall of a writer's paper clip, remains in its Otherness.⁷⁸ The motif of the fall, returned to in the image of the falling paper clip, is thus associated with the tender fallenness of language, its 'belatedness'; there is no "imitative word" for the sound the paper clip makes when it hits the floor, and despite the allegory of its "end-to-end bounce" that Lauren imagines, "half-remember[s], or sort of see[s] maybe", when she bends down "to pick it up, it isn't there".⁷⁹ All language, this passage seems to suggest, given its context of mourning-recollected, is the recollected mourning of an event, moment or sensation that recollection or representation can never catch up with. The point is that all

⁷⁸ In so far as the event is something we remember, and remember differently from the 'actual' event, then this Otherness is also what we can refer to as memory. In the image of a fall, we are given here, by DeLillo, a paragraph illustrative of the fallenness of subjectivity – a fall into time and space, a fall into belatedness and mediation. Moreover, what we find in such a passage is evidence of a certain deconstructive 'premise': that all effects of subjectivity result from remembering. Drucilla Cornell points this out, and in doing so associates memory and Otherness, when she writes that our experience of subjectivity is not something constituted in the present,

nor does the subject exist as a presence in and for itself. Instead the subject recollects himself in the act of remembrance of the Other in himself; an Other, however, that is beyond his memory, since she remains other. In spite of the limit of memory, the remembrance of things past is the story of the subject, the only one he can tell. For Derrida, the subject only becomes a self in and through the possibility of mourning. (*PL*, 76)

⁷⁹ Of course, this whole paragraph, coming as it does well after the appearance of Mr. Tuttle in the novel, helps 'explain' Tuttle as something remembered, made up, intuited, from memory, it helps 'explain' him as an important missed-perception, a sort of return of something 'not known' (trauma, Otherness) held in memory.

language is generated by delay and difference and that this experience of *différance* (irony) is the experience of origin that is original to the actual original experience. Which is to say that all language, because of the principle of *différance*, has its origins in Otherness, the very thing that marks language as tender, as a belated ruin, and as fallen. For this reason, all allegories bear irony within them. For an artist, such as Lauren, the *work* of art is indissociable from the ethical and faithful conviction that all allegories are, thus, ironic, but also, that this awareness is what makes for better or worse representations, making it possible to make distinct (in a DeLillo text if nowhere else) the work of art from other forms of representation and reproduction.

In effect, this passage reads almost as a sort of credo for the *work* of an artist in a DeLillo novel; in its proposition of an allegory of tenderness (its theme of subjectivity as fallenness) it also proposes the tenderness of allegory, as something remembered, reconstructed, an effect of ironised allegory that unveils not the ‘thing’, but rather, our seeing of the ‘thing’, making us aware how our representations make things seem “doubtful – not doubtful but ever changing, plunged into metamorphosis, something that is also something else, but what and what” (36). Lauren’s capacity to recognise her own tenderness, as a subject and as an artist, rests on this revelation of her fallen allegoricity. With this quotation, we are offered a definition of allegory (“something that is something else”), but one that is, notably, tethered to the restless turning and returning *work* of irony: marking the tenderness of allegory, but also the way allegory constantly tenders new allegories (“but what, and what” [?]). This last implied question is itself an expression we may liken to the “end-to-end” somersaulting of allegory.

Such an awareness of one’s allegoricity belongs to the ironist, and Lauren confirms this later in the text when she considers that “she thought in words sometimes, outright and fully formed. She wasn’t sure when this began to happen, a day or a month ago, because it seemed to have been the case forever” (113). The revelation here lies not in the recognition that she thinks in words, but that she always has, and that until a “day or month ago” – sometime around or after the Other-experience of Rey’s death – this was something she had habitually overlooked. Her understanding is, then, precisely one of the tenderness of allegoricity: that although we take our allegories of the world for granted, as clear and accurate representations of the world, in truth, such allegories only make the world *seem* like the something we make it out

to be. Indeed, as it appears to occur to Lauren, stuck in grief and sitting in traffic, the word “seems” contains within it the seductive power of allegory.

When you reach the top of the incline, something happens and the cars begin to move unhurriedly now, seemingly self-propelled, coasting smoothly on the level surface. Everything is slow and hazy and drained and it all happens around the word seem. All the cars including yours *seem* to flow in dissociated motion, giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of, and the highway runs in a white hum.

Then the mood passes. The noise and rush and blur are back and you slide into your life again, feeling the painful weight in your chest. (31)

In “seem” we have a word for the mediating, mitigating force – a sort of tenderness articulated by other “weak” words such as Lauren considers: “somehow”, “as-if”, “maybe” – located somewhere between the “noise and rush and blur” of unmediated Otherness (grief, trauma, non-linear time) and the seamless consumption of non-tender allegories.⁸⁰ Seem: “It all happens around [this] word,” we are told, including, of course, the novel’s narrative that begins: “Time seems to pass” (7). As readers of this text of an artist’s remembering we are meant to conjugate the *seeming* nature of allegory with the seeming time of narrative, to the purpose of unveiling *The Body Artist*’s project: the mortification of its arrangement of time, its mortification of its allegorical constructions, a deconstruction of an artist’s work of translation, and representation. All of which is to the purpose of exposing what is assumed beneath what *seems* to be true or accurate, exposing the processes that go undetected in translating one thing into another – to the purpose of displaying allegorical tenderness, and saving allegory from becoming “predictable and trite” (43). Again, “it all happens around the word seem”: the word itself (the *word*) has a sort of agency here, the power of language to translate and transform is the power of allegory – the traffic only *seems* to slow because of our being subject to language, and because it is possible in language – by the word – for this to *seem* to happen. The noise and blur continues in actuality, in its Otherness, but in the interim Lauren experiences what words, narrative, and by extension, art can offer, reprieve and consolation – smoothing, levelling, giving an “impression” of order. DeLillo’s floating phrase: “giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of” serves here as yet another of Lauren’s definitions of allegory. The traffic on the highway, a feature of a mourner’s insight into the feeling of estrangement from the ordinary traffic of human

⁸⁰ In coming to terms with the ‘Otherness’ of Tuttle, Lauren reflects on the tenderness of her language: “Somehow. The weakest word in the language. And more or less. And maybe. Always maybe. She was always maybeing” (92). But tenderness, as expression of weakness, is also a condition of imagining (and thus tendering, as I’ve been insisting); the artist’s *work*, in the wake of Otherness and loss, is always to be “maybeing”.

life, is also a metaphor for the traffic of allegorical language and its time keeping function. In this metaphor we note, then, how the tenor of the metaphor (language, allegory, signs) is conjugated to its vehicle (the cars) in such a way (another “stab” of a writer’s self-awareness) as to highlight that this is a quotation about language itself, how language mitigates and mediates an Otherness it is in fact inseparable from.

Language itself – its tenderness – is, then, what an artist in a text such as *The Body Artist* is bound to notice, since so much of the text is involved in the disclosure of its very textuality. The ‘seeming-ness’, we might say, of the language of the text must, in the manner of irony and mourning, be ‘deconstructed’ by Lauren (DeLillo) so that this very language (allegory, narrative) might faithfully be renewed in the *work* of art. For this reason it is, again, language that Lauren notices in its falling effect when she considers how “[s]he ran the water from the tap and seemed to notice. It was the first time she had ever seemed to notice this” (8). To “seem” becomes the verb, as in “to be”.⁸¹ Here the verb clause of the first sentence suggests there is something in particular to notice, but *notice* instead (the act of noticing) becomes like the object of the sentence. The point is that even those things we take for granted in the act of perception are themselves objects; the ordinariness of noticing here becomes strange, new seeming, like the word *notice* does in the sentence. Language is drawn attention to and this is because Lauren’s whole allegorical-world is under the pressure of mortification. The falling water, of course, is what Lauren *is* noticing and it is the secret object of the sentence, a secret because it seems to be missing at the end of the sentence. DeLillo is, again, making a point about language and how it is always a mediation of the real, the way in which language can become its own object, just as noticing (and because of DeLillo’s punning on this word) or to *notice*, is itself an object worth considering and not just a means to an end. In this regard what falls, what comes turning and tumbling out of the tap is words, allegory. Like the leaf, the tap water, falling from the faucet, also suggests time: the time taken for the stream of water to run from opaque to clear (8), like language moving from the unknowable Otherness of its provenance to the translucency with which we assume it functions. The tumbling of allegories, as de Man points out, is what engenders our temporal predicament. The time taken for one thing to seem as if another is precisely our experience of temporality, a temporality indexed to allegory, and, in DeLillo’s image

⁸¹ To seem, or not to seem to be, in *The Body Artist*, is the postmodern question. “I *seem*, therefore I am” might well be another formulation of the same concern.

of the falling water, to the time of the fall. Lauren's mortified allegories however, indicate that time has become Other, that she has lost her usual measure of time because of her exposure to Otherness. Lauren's tendering of allegory is thus a possibility of the fact that her allegories have become rhetorical, subject to irony, that even the most routine and seemingly insignificant of actions, perceptions and phrases have become strangely noticeable.

(iii) Time and the Other: "How much myth do we build into our
experience of time?"

What we have come to see in the previous section as Lauren's mortification of allegory is very much an effect of her experience of time's Otherness. Indeed, her undoing of allegory is part of her attempt to allow herself to feel time as it might *otherwise* be, rather than as it "seems"; as an artist, Lauren appears prepared to let this Otherness wash over her, to permit, as much as is possible, an unmediated tendering of her sense of self and her allegorical arrangements of time and space.⁸² The distinction between the world as it "seems" and the world as it might otherwise be signals *The Body Artist* as a self-consciously poststructuralist text, but what is remarkable about this text is that its narrator constantly meditates on the qualities of her translation of the Other into representation. Primarily, this meditation on allegory takes the form of an investigation into the Otherness of time, a sort of deconstruction of the allegoricity that as de Man has written is responsible for what he calls our "temporal predicament".⁸³ What this section sets out to do is introduce those

⁸² This notion of Otherness, as I've suggested, is crucial to the *work* of irony (the work of art) proposed in the text *because* the text reveals it as its *a priori* condition. All of that which is proposed in this thesis as the ethical or faithful aspects of the work of art, as pertains to the tenderness of DeLillo's philosophy of language, proceeds from this regard for Otherness.

⁸³ As I've suggested in the earlier chapters, within the poststructural the recognition of the relationship of sign and language to Otherness reveals (as de Man has shown through his investigation of allegory and irony) the "temporal predicament" of the subject. Because the subject's experience of being subject is one inscribed in language – in a semiotic economy governed by the 'law' of *différance* – the experience of subjectivity is best described as a living through the Other. All experiences of self, the present, presence and continuity etc. are effects of delay and difference; the self is an effect of all that vanishes from it, which is to say, the self is posited by an economy of differences, and is thus linked to, and an effect of, all that is different from the self. What this means, *à la* Derrida, is that all events of the present and all imaginings of the future come from Otherness – an Otherness that both DeLillo and Derrida appear to suggest can be thought of as memory. In short, we remember ourselves, we remember the present, the past, and the future; the 'real' experience of time is, as such, the experience of Otherness, distinct from what time "seems" to be as we translate it into linearity, continuity, narrative and allegory.

categories of time and Otherness as they are presented in the text. The purpose is to make clear the conditions of Otherness to which Lauren responds. Mostly this section seeks to foreground some basic assumptions about the Other so that we may read *The Body Artist* as the record of a process begun in trauma (the exposure of Otherness) that moves through memory to language, and the production of an ironic artwork. What I will argue is that *The Body Artist* meditates over the steps taken by the fallen-subject in a kind of rehearsal of what I have described earlier as the concerns and assumptions of DeLillo's 'deconstruction'. In the novel, the medium for this meditation, the articulation of Otherness through which Lauren's 'deconstruction' is performed, is Mr. Tuttle. As we shall see, Lauren's engagement with Tuttle effectively provides the context for what I have called the *work* necessary to the production of art, and primarily this is because Tuttle, for Lauren, is a sort of manifestation of *différance*; as an articulation of Otherness specific to Lauren, he resembles an impossible embodiment of irony.

Essentially, Lauren's relationship with Tuttle parallels the process of the translation of the Other. Tuttle, as I have suggested earlier, is to be understood as an emanation of Lauren's own Otherness; his presence is, in the text, likened to a sort of sub-conscious, involuntary body-memory. In effect, Tuttle is both the undecidable of interpretation as well as the "inevitable" (41) moment of representation. To attend to Otherness for Lauren is to attend to Tuttle, and what makes this novel a work about the *work* of an artist is that Lauren's engagement with the experience of Otherness is conducted through her concerns with representation, interpretation, translation, and reproduction. As I shall argue, what intrigues Lauren about Tuttle, and what it is that suggests the primacy of his role in the *work* of her art, is the notion that as an emanation of *différance* and irony, Tuttle is, in fact, representative of the very force of reproducibility, the possibility of reproduction that keeps the economy of language and representation going.⁸⁴ As Lauren appears to recognise (and this is why she starts using the Dictaphone) Tuttle becomes the occasion for an encounter with the conditions of difference, delay, Otherness and memory that reveals to Lauren something of the Otherness of Otherness, the Otherness of time and, with this, the tenderness of allegory.

⁸⁴ The inevitable translation of Tuttle that Lauren eventually performs is, *à la* Benjamin, not a literal reproduction of Tuttle as something else, but as a reproduction of what he in fact 'embodies': *différance*, or what, as I've indicated, we can think of as reproducibility – a capacity he is noted for in his reproduction of Rey's voice, words, mannerisms, body, and Lauren's memories, voice etc.

As I've suggested, what precedes Tuttle's 'arrival' is the shock and trauma of Rey's sudden death. In this state of shock Lauren's encounter with Otherness reveals itself primarily through what she feels to be a loss of allegorical time, specifically, of time as a narrative. As we have already seen, faced with the Otherness of time, language itself (the medium by which we 'keep' time) as Lauren perceives it, is revealed for all its allegoricity. As Lauren notes, language is revealed as "arbitrary" (91), "words hang in the room, predictable and trite" (43).⁸⁵ Rather than repressing this experience, Lauren, as artist, chooses to investigate it, asking in the process "[h]ow much myth do we build into our experience of time" (98). Her question is about the application of language and narrative to the unmediated, blurring Otherness of time, and raises the issue of what is at stake in our translation of this Otherness into myths, ideology, narrative, names and language. In the process of answering this question, both Lauren and the text endeavour to permit Otherness its fullest possible articulation, a radical re-tendering of all that for Lauren has been assumed as the "parameters" (66) and conditions of her existence. Such a willingness is thus reflected in her comments towards the end of the novel when she asks: "[w]hy shouldn't the death of a person you love bring you into lurid ruin?" (116).

However, in the days immediately after Rey's death, and in the early stages of her exposure to the Otherness of time, Lauren seeks out ways of measuring time. In a state of grief Lauren decides that her "plan" should be to "organise time until she could live again" (37) and this she does through a metric of chores and routines, counting the times each day that people ring to console her (36), making the "forty-minute march to an abandoned crafts center" (37), and using the ferry for its "schedule" of arrivals and departures (37). One effect of Lauren's experience of mortified allegorical time is that she learns to see more clearly its constructedness. Indeed, in the web-cam "feed" from Kotka, Finland, it is something of the tenderness of allegorised time, a quality, almost, of nostalgia, combined with her new sense of time's Otherness that compels her viewing. Moreover, in the Kotka feed Lauren finds a reflection of her own experience of time.

She sat and looked at the screen. It was compelling to her, real enough to withstand the circumstance of nothing going on. It thrived on the circumstance. [...] It was the sense of organization, a place contained in an unyielding frame, as it is and as you watch, with a reading of local time in the digital display in a corner of the screen. Kotka was another world but she could see it in its realness, in its hours, minutes and seconds.

⁸⁵ What I am referring to here as the time of the Other, the Otherness of time, as I will soon make clear, is not to be seen as a quality of timelessness but possibly the opposite, an ecstasy of unmediated time.

[...] She didn't know the meaning of this feed but took it as an act of floating poetry. It was best in the dead times. It emptied her mind and made her feel the deep silence of other places, the mystery of seeing over the world to a place stripped of everything but a road that approaches and recedes, both realities occurring at once, and the numbers changed in the digital display with an odd and hollow urgency [...]. (38)

What appeals to Lauren is the “organisation” of something Other, an other place, and with this, also, the evocation of circumstance and indeterminacy (“dead times” separated by the coming and going of traffic), all composed in an “unyielding frame”. Furthermore, the recording of local time combined with the spatio-temporal drama of cars approaching and receding confirms for Lauren the sense that “time [does] seem to pass” (7). Thus, from the perspective of her own profound temporal disorientation, the Kotka feed becomes an act of tender human poetry, one that reveals the human need for measurement and the surveillance of time, and a certain calibrated relationship to circumstance. And yet, because of the “unyielding frame” Lauren feels also the tenderness of the feed, the notion that it actually represents something beyond measurement, its own allegorical tenderness revealed through the contingency of framed, metricated time, contextualised by the raw open power of circumstance. In this last regard the feed can be read as poetic precisely because of its articulation of this irony. Moreover, the mortification of allegorical time as an “odd and hollow urgency” is the result of a spatial evocation of a temporal ‘irony’: two possibilities, coming and going, future and past made simultaneous with each other. In the dislocation between the feed footage and the digital display the very framing of an Otherness is highlighted, in a model of self-awareness validated in the sort of artworks DeLillo’s artists so often seem to approve of.

In the image from Kotka Lauren intuites a sort of rhyme for her experience of Tuttle. A similar intuition explains Lauren’s fascination with Mariella’s phone message. In both cases, Lauren recognises things in the world that represent her experience of Otherness, time and the condition of being in language.

She called Mariella and got the machine. A synthesized voice said, *Please / leave / a mess/age / af/ter / the / tone*. The words were not spoken but generated and they were separated by brief but deep dimensions. She hung up and called back, just to hear the voice again. How strange the discontinuity. It seemed a quantum hop, one word to the next. She hung up and called back. One voice for each word. Seven different voices. Not seven different voices but one male voice in seven time cycles. But not male exactly either. And not words so much as syllables but not that either. She hung up and called back. (67)

The machine message captures something of Lauren’s new understanding of language and its intersection with time and space, and like the Kotka feed is also perceived as a

kind of poetry.⁸⁶ This is because to Lauren's ears its articulation of spatial and temporal disjunctions is reminiscent of a 'representation' of *différance*. Lauren recognises in the message something of the differing and deferring forces at work in language: she 'sees' the words as spatial units separated by line breaks, and hears them as separated by "deep dimensions" of time. In one voice she hears the voices of Others caught in other time cycles – a metaphor for the infiltration of Otherness into not just the most routine phrases, but into statements of identity – a metaphor not only for Lauren's later ventriloquism of the voices of others, but also for the manifestation of Lauren's Other: Tuttle.

Tuttle's status as Other in the text corresponds directly to his status as figure of time, "sheer and bare" (92) and unmeasured.⁸⁷

Maybe this man experiences another kind of reality where he is here and there, before and after, and he moves from one to the other shatteringly, in a state of collapse, minus an identity, a language, a way to enjoy the savor of the honey-coated toast she watches him eat.

She thought maybe he lives in a kind of time that had no narrative quality. (64)

The Otherness of time is, then, specifically, that which is shorn of allegory, exactly what is referred to here as the quality of narrative. Such an Otherness, as I've been suggesting, is thus remarked on here for its 'shattering' of linguistically-given spatial and temporal arrangements: "here and there, before and after". Thinking her way through Tuttle's presentation, Lauren finds herself articulating an experience of Otherness that re-elaborates this shattering of oppositions: "She didn't know how to think about this. There was something raw in the moment, open-wounded. It bared her to things that were outside her experience but desperately central, somehow, at the same time. Somehow, what is somehow?" (63). On this last note a sense of the tenderness of language is returned to Lauren; "somehow" expresses the need for some different expression, a different word, an absent word or concept, as well as the need to extemporise and, within the moment of delay and difference, return to language "like a line in a piece of fiction" (91). The translation of this Other experience is

⁸⁶ Apart from the fact that Lauren scans the line for its rhythms and syllabic structure, its arrangement of silences, the phrase is also represented in the text with the poetic convention of back slashes indicative of line breaks or syllabic scansion.

⁸⁷ This idea is frankly addressed in the text when Lauren considers how in her conversations with Tuttle "[t]here was a missing beat. It was hard for her to find the tempo [...] She [...] couldn't locate rhythmic intervals or time cues [...] There were no grades of emphasis here and flatness there. She began to understand that their talks had no time sense [...]" (65). Furthermore, Tuttle's name is onomatopoeic for the sound of a clock. We find reinforcement of this interpretation when his movement is described as "a tick and tock, like the first toy ever built with moving parts" (62); he is like something invented with which to teach a fundamental understanding of time, time as Other.

attempted by Lauren, who looks for assistance in the language of science, a language of “parameters”; and what she begins to recognise is that a crucial capacity for division and separation is missing for Tuttle and that, as a result, he is “not able” (43) to construct in language the temporal and spatial allegories we use to experience a “now”.

He didn't know how to measure himself to what we call the Now. What is that anyway? It's possible there's no such thing for those who do not take it as a matter of faith. Maybe it was a physicist she needed to talk to, someone, she wasn't sure, who might tell her what the parameters were. She hated that word. She used it but didn't know what it meant and used it anyway. (66)

The “Now” is, via allegory, another category of what “seems”; but in the time of Otherness that Tuttle articulates, all “now” time is past-time remembered, is memory-time. “Now” is, we might say, an imposed “parameter”, an effect of an allegorisation of time. Indeed, something of this effect appears to be intuited by Lauren in her consideration of the word “parameter”. As Lauren possibly misuses it, “parameter” becomes a sort of ironic example (because of what the word means) for the mistaking of the world, an instance of the allegorical tenderness of all attempts to construct, measure and demarcate a “now”.

It is Tuttle who is the occasion in the text for the revelation of such allegorical tenderness and, as I've already signified, this is because he is, in effect, a sort of ventriloquism of Otherness. In his speech we find a re-imagining, a tendering, (by Lauren) of the experience of being from the impossible perspective of the Other. As an articulation of Otherness, Tuttle speaks in an ironic language, the language of *différance*.

Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left, am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment. (74)

In Tuttle's opening sentence the entire tradition of ontology, and with this, the primary allegory of “being” as origin is ironised; seen through the lens of *différance*, “being” is reconceived as an effect of a certain delay: “here” and “come” thus indicate spatial and temporal categories that suggest that “being” is something that has ‘arrived’, and is thus the consequence of a deferral. This is the knowledge Otherness (the articulation of Otherness provided for Lauren through Tuttle) provides the subject with. Tuttle's speech represents an examination from the perspective of someone recently estranged from her familiar arrangements of time, space and language, of the

condition of human subjectivity, and the human proclivity to represent and reproduce its ontological and philosophical assumptions. Tuttle continues:

Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. Leaving has come to me. We all, shall all, will all be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me. (74)⁸⁸

When Tuttle says “coming and going I am leaving” ‘his point’ is that regardless of the direction inscribed in language, all language is witness to a “leaving”; *différance*, the force or process personified in Tuttle’s “I”, is a name for the perpetual leave-taking of all that in being “with the moment”, “will leave the moment”: Tuttle (Lauren) is here evoking the drama of *différance*, the tracing of the Other that vanishes in the appearance of a sign, word or allegory. As an imagined manifestation of *différance*, Tuttle’s “I” expresses certain impossibilities of a temporality that language can only indicate by way of paradox: “I will go or not or never”, as well as equivocation, and a sense of immanent motility seen in the inhabiting of multiple tenses and spaces that results in the subordination (the loss of agency) of the subject-position, the “I”: “[a]nd I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be”.

In keeping with the evocation of *différance* Tuttle’s speech is such a study in, Tuttle’s phrase “we all, shall all, will all be left” is a statement about the inevitability of the sign and the subject returning to memory, residing in Otherness. Both sign and subject are, after all, *always already* effects of the delaying and differing of Otherness. This point is made when we consider how Tuttle’s two passages are dominated each by “coming” and “leaving”. From “being here has come to me” to “leaving has come to me” both indicate an experience of arrival. If “being here” and “leaving here” are both possibilities of something that has “come”, then both are returns, both are simultaneously possible,⁸⁹ and the model of time this assumes is not then one of linear teleology, but one of messianic immanence, the time of the Other where everything is a remembrance of what will come.⁹⁰ Tuttle, as Lauren imagines

⁸⁸ So when Tuttle says “leaving has come to me” we can read this as code for that sense of falling from the world, and entry into language, that I have been referring to, that is reinforced by the word itself, “leaving” which refers back to the images of leaves that throughout the novel have been associated with self-consciousness, lability, and language turning in impossibility.

⁸⁹ Here we return to the “floating poetry” of the Kotka web-cam, and the significance of its arrangement with circumstance; the road that both approaches and recedes, “both realities occurring at once” (38) is thus a metaphor for the simultaneity of past and future, the experience of the immanent time of the Other.

⁹⁰ Messianic time can be thought of as the insistence that through every moment in time, every allegory of a present, Otherness may come, may return or be recognised. Essentially, this is a description of the possibility that in every allegory a difference or other-meaning might be read.

him, is thus “a man who remembers the future” (100) and this is precisely a statement of the Derridean experience of faithful subjectivity, explained along the principles of *différance*. Because the subject is always a deferral and difference from all that is Other and, in this way, is also always an aspect of all that is Other, then all that the subject names as past, present, future or difference, is merely the return of all that will have been, is, in fact, a remembering of all that is Other that the subject is helplessly caught up in, like a matrix of possibility.⁹¹

* * *

You are made out of time. This is the force that tells you who you are. Close your eyes and feel it. It is time that defines your existence.

But this is the point, that he laps and seeps, somehow, into other reaches of being, other time-lives, and this is an aspect of his bewilderment and pain. (92)

What is referred to here as Tuttle’s “bewilderment and pain” is the result of his status as radical tenderness, as intersection of language and Otherness, *différance* – the tendering articulation of memory and Otherness through language, and, at the same time, the making tender of language (revealing its tenderness) by its exposure to Otherness. Tuttle is such a figure of articulation, a manifestation of irony, precisely because of this tendering dynamic. On the one hand, he is an allegory of Lauren’s experience of Otherness, an Otherness that, through Lauren’s skills as a body artist, finds its way into language. On the other hand, he is irony itself, the force that mortifies all language and with this, all relations to time and space, and the notion of subjectivity. Thus Lauren, thinking through Tuttle, is able to see how time is “the only narrative that matters” (92) even though, in Tuttle, she is also able to see that time is “something like itself, sheer and bare, empty of shelter” (92). Glimpsing, thus, the necessity of allegory as well as the fact of allegory’s tenderness, Lauren comes to an understanding about the central irony of her mourning. Such mourning, as Lauren’s arrangement with irony, is to be read as the context elaborated in Lauren’s following rumination.

It was the kind of day in which you forget words and drop things and wonder what it is you came into the room to get because you are standing here for a reason and you have to tell

⁹¹ Such an understanding of the “always already” nature of the time of the Other (what the novel indicates in its last pages with its use of the future perfect tense) explains the odd prescience with which both Lauren and Tuttle appear to intuit events yet to happen. What Rey refers to as Lauren’s “hyperpreparedness” is, in fact, a consequence of her artistic sensitivity to time, and in particular, her willingness to translate Otherness as Otherness as faithfully as is possible.

yourself it is just a question of sooner or later before you remember because you always remember once you are here.

The thing is communicated somehow. (83)

We find here another metaphor for the condition of fallen subjectivity, our tenderness, and how we are tendered by Otherness. This insight comes to Lauren as a result of both her experience of Otherness, the mortifying of the “standard sun-kissed chronology of events” (83), and her re-imagining of the ‘truth’ of “being here” through Tuttle. Subjectivity is a story (“narrative”) told in delay; the world happens and we can ‘know’ it through our bodies and translate it into language. In this way the thing – the object in the world (*das ding*) – is communicated, but only “somehow”. This, the word, as we have learned through Lauren’s meditations on it, is an epithet for our allegoricity, the weakness (92) and tenderness of language. What DeLillo appears to suggest in a book so conspicuously ‘about’ art and reproduction, is that the experience of Otherness is crucially linked to the possibility of art. What we might, therefore, say, is that for DeLillo, the defining feature of a work of art is that it must faithfully treat (mourn) the Otherness it is bound by human necessity to translate as allegory. Such an art-*work* will be that which mortifies its own methods of translation and reproduction – indeed, just as Lauren mortifies her own mode of signification, her body. The ‘form’ DeLillo appears to suggest, by way of Tuttle’s utterances, that is adequate to this work is irony – the articulation of Otherness *à la différence*. The flexion between Otherness and representation – precisely the “intersection” Lauren finds herself at – is conducted through *différance*; this intersection, we might say, is also the ironic crux of the possibility of signification.

(iv) The Work of Art

When she could not remember what he looked like, she leaned into a mirror and there he was, not really, only hintingly, barely at all, but there in a way, in a manner of thinking, in some mirrors more than others, more than rueful reproduction, depending on the hour and the light and the quality of the glass, the strategies of the glass, with its reversal of left and right, this room or that, because every image in every mirror is only virtual even when you expect to see yourself. (112)

Lauren’s “manner of thinking” is what we can refer to as ‘thinking Otherwise’, that is to say, thinking, as an author, in and through the third person, and in a text that inquires into issues of retrospection and representation, the image of Lauren trying to recall an-other in her mirror becomes instructive, not least for the metaphor of vision and mediation (every image is “only virtual”), but also for the sense of the Other as a

reflection of the self – the self as another’s Other.⁹² In Lauren’s mirror we also find a metaphor for language as “rueful reproduction”, as mournful, fallen medium – something suggested by the imprecision of the pronoun “he” that could be taken to refer to Rey or Tuttle, or even Lauren’s impersonation of them. The imprecision highlights the rueful qualities of both the mirror and language, but also the theory of language as “mirror” of reality. Lauren is hoping to find in the mirror the Other in herself, a process ‘reflected’ in language through its mortification, its exposure to an Otherness it cannot represent, and this is why the quotation turns back on itself, becomes a statement about itself – a reflection on the rueful nature of reflection – complicit within the project of representation. Just as Lauren mortifies her body so as to enable the articulation of another (body), as a writer she must also mortify (ironise) language – revealing its tenderness, its failure as mirror – so as to tender the Other in representation. In short, this is the *work* of the artist I shall elaborate on in this final section of this chapter, a *work* that, more generally describes the quality of the text, *The Body Artist*, which, as ‘authored’ by the artist herself, is subjected to the same mortifying processes of remembrance, re-construction and replay that characterise her own dramatised or recorded translation of the Other into art.

The tenderness of the novel, its arrangement with irony, is revealed when we consider that it is composed as a retrospection, a remembering, a return to a period of time immediately before, and then after, Rey’s suicide; the tenderness of the novel is thus a consequence of its revelation of the processes and decisions, the translations and constructed allegories, that underpin the text *as* a reconstruction, *as* a remembering. As I’ve suggested, the text is to be read as an artist’s deconstruction of the *work* of representation – the very way the work represents what it represents. All of which is to say that the work of art DeLillo proposes, through Lauren, in *The Body Artist*, is best exemplified by the work the reader of the text holds in their hands. The work of art, for DeLillo – and this explains the metafictional tendencies of the novel – is the work that reveals the *work* entailed in reproduction. As I’ve shown already, such a conviction is apparent in DeLillo’s merging of the novel’s content as its form: which is why we can say that the novel is ‘about’, among other things: the deconstruction of allegorical and narrative temporality, the conspicuous elaboration of

⁹² Here we note a blurring of the subject that makes Tuttle, Rey and Lauren all subjects of Lauren’s gaze. The point is to blur the division between self and Other and to foreground the ethical notion that the self is always constituted to some degree by the Other and as Other; there can be no ethics without the capacity that Lauren demonstrates to see herself as an Other.

a narrator's 'unreliability', a heightening of textual materiality where the narrator appears to shatter certain conventions of novelistic narrative via irruptions of self-consciousness ("What's it called?" (9); "Many things are interesting, fool" (82)), which, along with a more general narrative self-awareness (Lauren's unfinished sentences, elisions, rhetorical questions, and equivocations: "he ate breakfast or he didn't" (86)) serve to foreground for the reader this notion that the text is a recording of its own reproduction.

Moreover, certain other novelistic assumptions are also overturned: the inclusion of Rey's obituary and Mariella Chapman's article on Lauren and her performance, disrupt and mortify the notion of the well-made novel, and, of course, but for Mariella's relatively minor reference to it in her article, the supposed centre-piece of the novel, the artwork *Body Time* that the text appears to offer as its culminating achievement, is absent from the text. In its absence, we have only its mediated translation by Mariella. Indeed, the absence of the artwork from the novel is apposite to the novel's prioritisation of the work and ethics of reproduction (revealed in the text, as we've seen, through Lauren's investigation of Otherness, of Tuttle as manifestation of irony) over what is reproduced; DeLillo's text is 'about' the conditions and demands an artist must be faithful to in the process of making "meaning", rather than an attention to the "meaning" made. Lauren's own comments about the performance, along with her rejection of Mariella's suggestion that it is about the death of Rey, make this clear when Lauren says: "Maybe the idea is to think of time differently" (107). As we've seen, this endeavour to think of time differently is also an effort to strip back allegorical coincidence, not least of all the sort of allegorical reading that would posit Rey's death as the subject matter of the performance. "When time stops, so do we. We don't stop, we become stripped down, less self-assured" (107) continues Lauren, indicating as she does so not only her constellation of allegory, temporality and identity, but also, that the sort of artwork validated by Lauren (and DeLillo, I argue) is one that in tendering the Other, tendering the processes involved in the act of representation, will be one that manifests a certain absence, Otherness, and resistance to determination. For this reason the absence of the 'artwork' (*Body Time*) from the novel is entirely consistent with Lauren and DeLillo's ironic philosophy. In this, the final section of this chapter, I will look at some of the qualities that, for DeLillo it seems, help define the work of art. Such qualities, by virtue of *The Body Artist's* status as an artist's work-journal, are

elaborated through Lauren's various rehearsals, practices and processes; among these I consider her treatment of time, her body preparation, and what I refer to as her renovation of allegory.

Essentially, this idea of the renovation of allegory – a constant theme and concern of all the DeLillo texts discussed in this thesis – begins on the very first page of *The Body Artist* in the elaboration of an opening section (that I will continue to refer to as the breakfast scene) that can be considered a sort of ironic set-piece, a self-consciously “written” and, to some degree, metafictional composition. The opening section of the novel is intended to be seen as a retrospection, a reconstruction of the actual morning before Rey's suicide that the artist and author, Lauren, composes as an example of the kind of tender representation, the *work* elaborated throughout the rest of the text, has been preparation for. In a sense, this composition re-places into the world of the “seem” an Otherness so often overlooked. Within the documentary mimeticism of the breakfast scene, with its studied representation of a couple's routine distance from each other, their unspoken division of possessions, spaces, and roles, and its presentation of an unexamined and overlooked allegorical system, the artist/author inscribes a ghosting of Otherness: the foregrounding of the scene's status as a remembering⁹³ is thus a foil for the self-conscious placement within this scene of objects, details and experiences cathected with the “future” experiences of loss, Otherness, and Tuttle, the novel will, itself, soon elaborate on.

One such ghosted detail is presented in the text in the form of an irony, a certain deferral of meaning neither the text nor Lauren ever resolves, when Rey announces at breakfast: “I want to say something but what?” (8). Typically for DeLillo, it is in the evocation of an absence – this unsaid and withheld piece of information – that Otherness (all that is yet to come in the novel) is articulated. In this way, Rey's silence anticipates his eventual suicide – ghosts, in fact, the entire work of the novel Lauren will perform. Lauren misses the chance of discovering his meaning, primarily through inattention, but also through a kind of overlooking that is the consequence of

⁹³ The scene, we note, begins with the deictic expression: “It happened this final morning” (7), that by itself indicates the quality of remembering and retrospection that is not to be overlooked as a given of narrative temporality. We are directed to this awareness later in the text when Lauren, in the first person asks: “do you recognise what you said weeks earlier to someone you loved and would never see again [?]” (87). The breakfast scene for all its seemingly precise recall of dialogue, is an imagined replay, that we, the readers, are supposed to see as a tender, constructed, self-consciously imagined replay, a studied evocation of Otherness and loss, ghosted in allegory, inserted into the “seeming” surface of language.

a vanity of interpretation: “I know anyway. So tell me” (18). Rey has, at this point, resolved to keep his peace on the matter, but he sees here the chance to end the discussion, saying with an irony Lauren also overlooks “yes. You’ve read my mind” (18). The irony ramifies as the reader of the text, in retrospect, realises that this parable of intimate estrangement, of representation subordinated to routine miscommunication, will culminate in Rey’s suicide. In effect, the reader is thus given a dramatic irony to remember, that is to say, the remembering of a certain unknown knowledge, a knowledge entirely out of step with the narrative temporality as, per convention and routine, we make our knowledge of Others “seem”. As we have seen in the previous section on time and the Other, this is precisely the experience Lauren documents throughout her narrative, and is now embedding in the opening scene of the text.

Such a textual effect is the correlative of that hair in Lauren’s mouth, analogous also to the experience of some event peripheral to consciousness and knowledge, something on the outer edge of experience and one’s capacity to represent experience that “takes a second or two before you know it and even then you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body” (89). Rey’s “great” ironic “amplified smile” (18), like the hair Lauren picks from her mouth, is an example of an Otherness that unsettles and perturbs the surface appearance of things – in this case, the surface appearance of mimetic representation that the breakfast scene is designed to put the reader in mind of, especially with its motif of attempted precision of description – Lauren’s repeated attempts to describe the smell of the soya granules, the sound, like “b’s” and “r’s” of the birds leaving the feeder, and her close observation of the apparitional blue jay. Indeed, the blue jay can be seen to be another example of the text floating a hair into the reader’s consciousness, an image of irony, essentially, in so far as the presentation of the bird in the text is, at once, both an occasion of description, observation and allegory and the presentation of something entirely in excess of observation and allegory. As with the previous examples, the bird, remarkable in the text for this quality of irony, ghosts a certain understanding (tenders various readings) that cannot initially be explained. In its own uncanny manner the bird signifies something known without being known, something finally remembered as known – a future knowledge to be remembered. Thus, the blue jay can be seen as a metaphor for, and foregrounding of, Tuttle, but also represents considerations of blindness, perception and the representation of Otherness, a

commentary on the routinely missed Otherness of those we live with, and the establishment of motifs of mimicry and impersonation (21-22). The point is, the scene is designed to comport within it all that the novel will, in the course of its narrative, unpack and present; with the image of the blue jay we are given the impression of this ‘knowledge’ ostensibly before it is communicated, and in this respect, the novel is replicating something like an encounter with Otherness – but an Otherness that for the (first time) reader, like Lauren, will have to be remembered, reconstructed, “written like a line in a piece of fiction” (91).⁹⁴

In the breakfast scene we are tempted to find signs or portents of Tuttle’s arrival in the details of its studied and composed description, to find evidence that might explain his invention, his appearance in the text; but DeLillo is actually asking us to do the reverse, since the breakfast scene is itself a retrospection, a composition posterior to, but evocative of, Rey’s suicide and Tuttle’s appearance. Thus, the breakfast scene, we might consider, is not composed for the purpose of finding justification of the Other’s manifestation, but, rather, to make a point about the manifestation of Otherness in the detailed recording of the ordinary and everyday. *The Body Artist*, we might say, is a ghost story in reverse: it is not that we discover a ghost haunting the ordinary, but that the “ordinary” is itself *always already* the ‘ghost’ of Otherness, that hauntings are essentially conditional to language, and that this is the discovery (of irony) crucial to the possibility of art as well as allegory.

It is for this reason then, that DeLillo gives his ‘ghost’ (Tuttle) only the scraps of allegorical representation to utter, only the phatic content of two lives lived in their ordinariness, for speech; Tuttle’s comments, as Lauren notes, consist of a cobbling together of “routine remarks” (51) that have been overlooked, but now, through Tuttle, are replayed, and repeated differently. The effect Tuttle has on such overlooked remarks is something Lauren incorporates into her work, especially

her slow-motion repetitions of everyday gestures, checking the time on your wrist or turning to hail a cab, actions quoted by rote in another conceptual frame, many times over and now slower and over, with your mouth open in astonishment and your eyes shut tight against the intensity of passing awareness. (58)

⁹⁴ The experience the reader is exposed to as a ‘remembering of the future’ is acknowledged in the conspicuous shift in Lauren’s narrative voice into the future perfect (“she will already have been there [...]” (122); “they will already have slept and wakened” (123)) that occurs after Lauren’s performance of *Body Time* and her return to the house. This temporality is indicative of the “always already” of what in deconstruction, Derrida refers to as the time of the Other.

To repeat differently, to renovate the “routine”, as Lauren does here, and to permit Otherness its articulation through the “everyday”, all requires a slowing down of time, a winding back of allegorical immediacy and presence, opening the space for the consideration of *différance*. Essentially, this is the *work* Lauren (and the reader) must perform when faced with the demand to translate and allegorise Tuttle – when faced with the demand of what Lauren sees as his inevitability (41). Inevitability (as in the category of the immediate) is what Lauren has to strip back in order to think Otherwise. As I have said, the issue for the text (and for ethical irony) is not the inevitable appearance of Tuttle (or the Other), but the question of this condition of inevitability as it relates to our representations of Otherness and the world. In the first moment of meeting (the “inevitable”) Tuttle, Lauren, we are told, “felt her way back in time to the earlier indications that there was someone in the house and she arrived at this instant, unerringly, with her perceptions all sorted and endorsed” (41). The novel ‘deconstructs’ this inevitability – reconstruing it not as something “sorted and endorsed”, but as a tenderness, an effect produced by the process of tendering the Other in language. Without the questioning of Tuttle as “sorted and endorsed” the novel would not be able to present tenderness, imagination or irony, because the act of retrospection and recuperation would be complete. Instead, Lauren proceeds to undermine this inevitability – her perceptions cannot be trusted – and she openly errs in her imaginative work, and this seems necessary to the *work* of irony and art. Indeed, with de Man in mind, we might consider the *work* Lauren performs here as the *work* of a good-faith, non-innocent misreading. In effect, then, Tuttle becomes an awareness for Lauren to measure against habits and routines of representation and time, an occasion by which to mortify and thus, renovate allegory.

For this reason Lauren takes Tuttle with her to the “sprawling malls”, “the world in geometric form, patterned and stacked [...] long aisles of products and [...] shoppers in soft shoe trance” (64). Lauren wants to reveal to herself, through whatever might “warrant his regard”, what she has “forgotten how to see” (64). Tuttle is like a lens, then, Lauren uses to peel back the routine things we/she no longer look at properly, and the context for this looking is specifically, allegory – allegory as it has become like the “geometric” and “patterned” forms of the malls, like a product or commodity, something to maintain the trance-like state of the shoppers. The point is that it is by tendering Otherness, and the consequent ironisation of allegory – what I have been referring to as Lauren’s *work* – that such a vision (and critique) of allegory, and thus,

the demand for a more faithful remembering of the allegorical, is made. A similar point is made later in the novel when Lauren considers the newspapers she reads. Again, a sense of allegory's diminishment into commodity-trance-form begins with a reflection on her own processes of allegorical representation: "the stories she told herself did not seem hers exactly. She was in them so heedlessly they seemed to come from a deeper source [...] a thing that was overtaking her [...] [t]hey did not come from the newspaper" (115). The "source" she refers to is what I have been calling the Other. What is significant about this point is that Lauren recognises that 'her' "stories", her allegories, are linked to Otherness, are possibilities of Otherness, and with this understanding comes a sense of the complexity and tenderness of allegory, indeed, of representation. However, this is an understanding belied in the form of the newspaper – a "slick hysteria of picture and ink, the world so fleetingly easy to love and hate, so reliable and forgettable in its recipes and wars and typographical errors" (115). Here, allegory is reduced to "recipes", a consumer law governed by the ease of oppositions ("love" and "hate"); moreover, such allegory, in being seemingly reliable (routine, stable, irony-less) is also forgettable and thus, represents a forsaking of memory and Otherness. In such a state allegory, as the quote suggests, is relegated to the tenderless-ness of incompetent application, a constituency of "typographical errors".

As I've said, for Lauren, Tuttle is a kind of mirror or lens by which, she is able to explore in imagination some possibilities of herself, those she has lived with and forgotten, and qualities of relationship as they might Otherwise be. For this reason Tuttle is both the Other person and, reflexively, the third person to Lauren herself, a figure she is given to consider in the mirror: not Tuttle, but herself, transformed into the Other – a spook – who, as the unseen, is looked through, but also as a lens is used to see with.

This was her work, to disappear from all her former venues of aspect and bearing and to become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance [...] In the mirror she wanted to see someone who is classically unseen, the person you are trained to look through, bled of familiar effect, a spook in the night static of every public toilet. (84)

Lauren attempts to turn her body into a "venue" for "looking through", precisely a medium of reproduction – in the manner of irony or *différance* – to the purpose of articulating the Other (person) we don't see, we overlook, or in the punning phrase used above, "look through"; Tuttle, as the mirror, body, and lens that Lauren sees through, enables her to see differently, to learn to see allegorically all over again,

indeed, to “look through” allegory as a newly ground lens. The result, for Lauren, as for the reader of *The Body Artist*, is the renovation of allegory.

The emphasis on the body in the investigation of Otherness is metaphor for the presence of Otherness within language and allegory. What this analogy suggests is that both body and language are mediums of the Other, given that we are well attuned enough to read them closely enough. When tendered faithfully, both the body and language (allegory) become textual – become in fact what the text *The Body Artist* is itself an example of – an artwork, an Other articulation of Otherness, worked through irony and *différance*. We note, then, the process of mortification that Lauren subjects her body to, and how this *work* of intense examination (pushing the limits of flexibility, endurance, and resistance, stripping and purging, as well as the *work* of alteration, and supplementation), mirrors the authorial *work* of composition and analysis. Indeed, body and language are both caught up in the process of something like editing, and brought together by Lauren in the way she conceives of her treatment of her body, using “clippers and creams that activated the verbs of abridgement and excision” (76). Her body practice is analogous to her textual practice; her scrutiny of her body becomes a metaphor for close reading: “she studied her fingers and toes. There was a way in which she isolated a digit for sharp regard, using a magnifier and a square of dark cardboard [...]” (76). The work of examination borders on what we might call a deconstruction of her body, something, perhaps, hinted at by Lauren when she reflects: “how nearly scholarly the pleasures of extraction” (84).

The reason for such sustained examination and deconstruction of allegory, as evident here in Lauren’s re-tooling of her body, but also, as the experience of the novel’s textuality, is to the purpose of re-tendering and renovating of our ways of seeing, hearing, translating and representing. All of which is relevant to the sort of conjecture Lauren makes earlier in the novel when she considers Tuttle: “[...]s]he wondered what he saw, or failed to see, or saw so differently she could never begin to conjure its outlines” (50). Simply put, Lauren’s ‘text’ responds to such a conjecture by putting forth in presentation the conditions of its own reproduction and its own representational tenderness, articulating, as it does so, the Otherness of others, even those – a husband, or a mother (124) – we have lived with. Although the canvas is small and intimate here, Lauren’s *work* in *The Body Artist* represents a theory of the *work* of art that forms the basis for the philosophies of language and reproduction that

serve the critique of a capitalist culture DeLillo pursues throughout the enormity of *Underworld*.

Chapter Three: *Underworld*

Part One: The Triumph of Death

It's called an Indian burn – remember? One hand grinding one way, the other going the other, twisting hard, working fast (*Underworld*, 48).

... [T]ogether, they [allegory and irony] form, in fact, the rhetoric of memory ... (*Memoires for Paul de Man*, 82).

In a *punctum*-like moment in *Underworld* an almost self-aware narrating voice asks 'us' to "remember". But what is it to remember, and what is memory? DeLillo gives us an answer when he gives us the question, which is to say; he gives us an allegory for memory (the "Indian burn") even as he makes of this allegory a question ("remember?"), almost a demand. Memory itself is always remembered, tendered by allegory. So it is memory, then, that is accessed by this double-handedness – two hands working at once in opposite directions, in a metaphor, I suggest, for the *work* of allegory and irony, and for the tender impression their *work* leaves on us (not least, the skin). In a novel that, as DeLillo has said, is "about memory" (how the "past is constantly with us")⁹⁵ this play, a twisting together of allegory and irony, can be seen as the structuring rhetoric of a text that moves between the demands of naming and representation involved in remembering, and the "underworld" Otherness of memory itself.⁹⁶ Of course, in order to feel the "burn" of tenderness, both hands (allegory *and* irony, naming *and* forgetting) have to be working at the same time, together, though *Underworld* demands to be read as a record of the ways in which a culture has largely avoided such tenderness through adherence to what can be seen as an economy of motivated misrecognition, a "commodity-symbolic" predicated on the systemic avoidance of Otherness.⁹⁷ Such an avoidance – a denial of irony, a refusal of memory, and with this, the radical etiolation of allegory – is characterised throughout

⁹⁵ See Richard William's interview with Don DeLillo "Everything Under the Bomb". *Guardian*, January 10, 1998.

⁹⁶ As I suggest throughout this chapter, what DeLillo proposes as memory is also what I propose with my conception of Otherness.

⁹⁷ The phrase "commodity-symbolic", that I use throughout this chapter as an expression of capitalism's construction of an economy of desire and consumption based around allegory, comes from Molly Wallace and her article "'Venerated Emblems': DeLillo's *Underworld* and the History-Commodity" in *Critique*. Summer 2001, vol. 42, no. 4.

Underworld as a culture's failure to mourn Otherness.⁹⁸ From the question of mourning and the relationships subjects have to Otherness comes DeLillo's entire ethics of art and subjectivity, as well as his critique of systems of connection and consumption. It is my assertion that DeLillo's 'argument' in *Underworld* is one that responds to the forces of commodification, the production of consumer allegories, by proposing the tenderness of allegory, and that to do this means theorising irony. Such a 'theory' of irony recognises irony as both a vital and constituent force within allegory repressed by the system of capitalism DeLillo critiques.

What DeLillo calls the "Indian burn" is also like the "existential burn" (*U*, 406) of Otherness, and a sense of this is already secreted in the childish exoticism of the phrase itself, with its reference to something or someone "Indian". DeLillo has always had an ear for the seemingly unremarked or unremembered Otherness within the language of the everyday. It is a part of his Emersonian attention to the quotidian, and demonstrates a level of intimacy with language that, in the novel, the Jesuit Father Paulus becomes a spokesperson for. In the text, Father Paulus speaks to Nick Shay about the sort of person his school aims to produce: someone who "develops a certain depth, a spacious quality, say, that's a form of respect for other ways of thinking and believing" (538). This is, I suggest, also the project for DeLillo's *Underworld*. "Let us unnarrow the basic human tubing" (538), says Paulus, and in *Underworld* it is DeLillo's artist-figures who take this conviction as the defining quality of their work; such figures thus move toward "an ethical strength" that shows them who they are and how one "is meant to address the world" (538). Firstly, then, the hope of this "ethical strength" comes from an attention to language, an almost prayerful attention to the tenderness of language that, although it is all we have with which to tender the Other, can only fail to make this Other present. And yet the world remains to be tendered; one is "*meant* to address the world". So we are left here with the problem of mourning – how to treat Otherness, as we must. Essentially, this is *Underworld*'s great theme, the treatment of Otherness, explored with essay-like rigour through variously tender and tender-less versions of mourning and irony, variously tender and tender-less allegories.

⁹⁸ But, more immediately, *Underworld* is a text of mourning because its core cast of characters, Nick, Matt, Marvin, Klara, and Bronzini are all in mourning for something or someone lost, all defined by a relationship to death or absence, all motivated by their experience of Otherness.

What I call Otherness, then, along with memory, is, for my own project, as well, I think, as for DeLillo's, *the* issue for *Underworld*, just as I argue it is for *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis*. Primarily, this is what makes DeLillo's texts so compatible with Derrida's later writings. It is important to ground DeLillo's assumptions pertaining to Otherness in the early stages of a chapter such as this, and to this end we might consider the Bruegel painting, *The Triumph of Death* (see fig. 1, p.93). In *Underworld* this painting stands as a tableau expressive not only of the goings-on of that day, October 4, 1951 (the Pennant game at the Polo Grounds, New York; the test, by the Soviets, of a nuclear device) and not least the goings-on of a culture's misrecognised and submerged mourning, but also of DeLillo's own insights and assumptions about the constellation of subjectivity, temporality, and language. The painting, a text within a text, serves, for DeLillo, to highlight the *work* of interpretation and translation. In fact, the painting depicts this *work*, while itself becoming an "other-site" for multiple meanings and connections in the novel, but in such a way as to make its subject-matter the urge to connection rather than the meaning of connections made.⁹⁹ The painting presents us with a variety of competing and, at times, contrary interpretations. Chief among such interpretive possibilities is the translation or representation of Otherness as the figures of the dead who "fall upon the living" (50). This equation of death with Otherness is something the painting seems designed to both suggest and complicate. As such, DeLillo appears here to present a sort of framing (*mise en scène*) of the ironies of death – such as how, in the manner of the Other, death is not so much the result of an interpretation of 'something', but rather the force of interpretive possibility itself, indeed, the very force of the Other I take to be *Underworld*'s 'subject-matter'. At first we may conceive of Bruegel's army of the dead as the returning (in fact, *always already* returned) Otherness of the present. In this regard, the painting can be read as a recording of what I have previously termed the "time of the Other".

A sense of this temporality is immediately apparent in the sense of unpreparedness and incredulity in such figures as the nobleman, only 'now' drawing his sword when apocalypse is already upon him; the King (or Emperor), we note, reclines in a

⁹⁹ This is an important distinction to make since, contrary to what some commentators of *Underworld* have said, this novel is not a celebration of the logic of connection, but rather, performs a sort of critique of the desire to connect – specifically a critique of what we might call, tender-less connections. Indeed, the often voiced notion that "everything's connected" (*U*, 289) has to be checked against DeLillo's own comments that "meaning is a con game" and that "paranoia is easy" [see Begley interview with DeLillo in *Paris Review* 128, 1993].



state of utter bemusement, while a pair of lovers in the lower foreground continue to court one another, only a suggestion of anxiety in the twist of the lute player's head; the backgammon and card game has only recently been disturbed, as have the diners at the dinner table, and yet the suddenness and feel of the unexpected these characters suggest seems entirely out of step with the broader temporality of the picture suggested by that "flaring sky in the deep distance"(50), and the depiction of the dead's progress from a smoking horizon upon the living. These human figures in the foreground of the painting seem denizens of a different temporality to that of the skeletal soldiers in the rest of the picture. The human figures occupy a temporality we might consider calling something like the living present, though this is a present in which we see the eruption of the past – memory, the repressed, the dead. The 'time' of the dead (as in the arrival of the Other) is thus indexed to the depth of perspective in the picture (the smoking horizon), and still the living have been caught unaware. We see here the temporality of the Other, and of *Underworld* itself, that presents the past as coterminous with the present. The painting is about the unforeseen coming of the Other, the thing that in Derrida's language will already have happened. The painting, in this sense, can also be read as a metaphor that over five hundred years later will be updated by the advent of the Internet; these death-figures represent (as we will see later) the spread of information and technology associated also throughout *Underworld* with radiation.

In the painting we are given an occasion by which to consider different ways of reading the 'dead', different ways of thinking about what "death" means and signifies.¹⁰⁰ DeLillo wants to remind the reader how death (loss and absence) is related to the possibility of the sign and the name, which is to say, he wants to remind us that by necessity, the sign is not summed up in a presence, but that it disappears leaving only a trace. Essentially, death operates here, in DeLillo's presentation of the

¹⁰⁰ There perhaps needs to be a distinction made here over the use of the word "death" in relation to language and allegory. A reductively allegorical "language", without a relation to irony, and as seen in the paranoid or logocentric visions of several of DeLillo's characters, is what we can call a dead language. But it is dead because it has closed down its relationship with the force of death, which, as Derrida has shown, is the animating principle of language, naming and writing; death gives language the possibility of iteration and difference. Again this boils down to the question of mourning. Ironic language (allegory purified by irony) maintains a relationship with the force of death and so can, in this way, be said to be a language of death. What I suggest DeLillo finds to critique about the commodity-symbolic of capitalism is, then, how it gives death to death. Of course there is a strong precedent for this notion in *White Noise* with its involvement with "Dylar", that medication designed to cure the patient of the fear of death, and *Americana* confirms this notion with its quotation of St. Augustine: "[a]nd never can a man be more disastrously in death than when death itself shall be deathless" (21).

painting, as signifier of irony; in its synchronous moment, irony “renders” both the name and an awareness of the necessary death the name holds within itself. Irony is, then, an index to the non-presence of the underworld of excess – of memory and Otherness. Through irony, this Otherness is articulated by virtue of irony’s unmasking of the sign as limited, as mournful tenderness.

In the Bruegel print, *Death*, we note, cannot appear but as allegory *for* death. The dead arrive under the sign of the cross, their coming is heralded by this sign, and is, in fact, indivisible from the appearance of the sign: death is already allegorised – their arrival is also the arrival of a new or different allegory. Moreover, death is anthropomorphised as skeletons with “wispy dicks” (50); these dead appear as an undefeatable but curiously human army, indeed, an army of metaphor¹⁰¹ – we note a group of skeletons conferring at the top of the picture, as though referring to some plan, the soldiers of the dead wear robes or sheets and even take to wearing the garments of their victims. Moreover, the dead exhibit human desires and appetites: this is not death as the Other, but death as a translation, and so towards the bottom of the picture deathly mockery becomes human venality as one of the skeletons runs its fingers through the King’s gold; another of the dead pursues a woman in such a way as to suggest the sexual, grasping at her from behind, his hands at her breasts.¹⁰² We note too, the skeleton in the bottom right-hand corner who joins the lovers in their duet, taking up the lute, while another, pouring out the diner’s wine gourds, seems to signal the allegorical nature of the entire onslaught, and its relationship to a kind of trickery, by his adoption of a masquerade. Death is seen to appropriate the desires, affectations and artifices, even the failings and longings of the living whom the dead have come not merely to hasten to the underworld, but in fact to replace. As such we can read in Bruegel’s painting something DeLillo dramatises in the novel: how something seemingly as Other, unknowable and timeless as death can become somehow familiar, allegorical, and temporal, translated into the present. As DeLillo perhaps sees it, the painting illustrates how a resistance, even that of irony or art, can be turned into an allegory, and by extension, a commodity or product. *The Triumph of Death*, we might consider, is, in this regard, prescient to the triumph of capitalism

¹⁰¹ Indeed, as Nietzsche might have seen it, a “mobile army of metaphors” – and, what is more, metaphors of class, power, ideology as well. The point is, as I think DeLillo sees it, the painting is ‘about’ signs, semiotics, and language – the *representing* of death as much as death itself.

¹⁰² Hoover also has noted a similar suggestion: “a second dead woman in the middle ground, straddled by a skeleton. The position is sexual, unquestionably” (50).

because, by this reading, it is a parable of the ‘death of death’, the allegorisation of the force of irony and its articulation of Otherness.

The “triumph” of death that the painting represents is not then simply the triumph of this skeletal army (though, at an allegorical level, it is this as well), but rather the death of death – the very story of death’s translation into something more knowable, familiar, human. The painting thus represents the turning of Otherness into a technology, of allegory, yes, but also a technology of war. Nothing escapes in the picture, not even death, for it, too, has been allegorised, and but for the fool depicted in the bottom right-hand corner of the print, this would be true: in his gaze we see death’s real triumph – the unlocatable, unnameable excess of the picture, the thing that escapes, the moment of absence and loss the painting can only make us aware of, and cannot ‘represent’. If the dead, in truth, are intended to represent allegory (in a sense, the ‘truth’ of representation seen as the inevitability of translation and misrecognition) then the actual moment of Otherness, the *punctum* (again), or irony, exists not *in* the painting (not as something mourned by the painting through an act of incorporation), but as something pointed to, beyond its frame, its reality, something unaccountable by the painting’s own terms. That something is, of course, as I have just suggested, the ‘you’ or Other who views the painting and catches the stare of the fool, about to crawl under the diners’ tablecloth. The fool’s gaze, one of utter surprise, registers what in Derrida’s scheme we recognise as the emergence or experience of Otherness – one’s seeing preceded by one’s being seen. The fool appears to look in the direction of the mask-wearing skeleton; his expression, as noted, of utter surprise, is one of seeing something unexpected, normally unseen, something un-represented, as though at an irony the painting cannot and does not explain, but he is also looking at us, at our unseen gaze, looking at our looking. In an instant, the fool sees both the Other (us, and death as possibility) and the mask (allegory of death), and this becomes the *punctum* of the painting, its moment of unmasterable irony – its presentation of “truth”. In this way, the painting becomes an act of mourning: a representation, yes, but one that signifies its own limits, and the very ‘subject’ it cannot apprehend – its Other. The painting is a presentation of tenderness.

The effect, we note, recurs in the novel through DeLillo’s use of the second person “you” narration, and is remembered in the closing image of the Eisenstein film *Unterwelt* with its depiction of a face that stares down through the camera lens, back to the viewer, as it transforms and dissipates into the surrounding landscape.

Something of this effect is apparent also in Klara's artwork that makes its 'subject' the desert that frames the work in the manner of the *parergon*. In all cases, the appearance of Otherness comes, like the injunction with which I began, "remember" (14), as a sort of *punctum*, (the presentation of irony without representation) connecting Otherness and memory as names of an unmasterable excess. The point, it seems, is that DeLillo does not 'represent' Otherness, but only in so far as he aims to set out the question of its representation. DeLillo mourns Otherness and in so doing investigates this mourning, this condition of irony, in the culture. Like the work of Bruegel, Eisenstein, Klara, even Lenny Bruce, and towards the end of the text, the considerations of Nick and the work of Ismael (Moonman) Munoz, Otherness becomes an effect of DeLillo's investigation into the limits of the economy of language and subjectivity, an effect of the conscious recognition of the tenderness of our allegories and how this tenderness attends to the truth of language, economy, and systems that appear to work to simulate, repress, and control this truth, and with this, the apparition of the Other.

So *Underworld* is, among other things, about representation, the treatment of Otherness and the role of allegory and irony in the mourning of Otherness. As a part of its ethical drive towards a theory of art, *Underworld* is a text that probes the vulnerabilities of allegory as well as its melancholy beauty. To do this is to think through the subject's placement in Otherness and memory, and it is to perform an analysis of irony. What turns DeLillo's characters from mourners into "unnarrowed" ethical beings (artist-figures) is the recognition by such figures of the irony at the heart of all mourning (that we are constantly in mourning by virtue of being in the world, being-in-language) and how, with this recognition, they re-discover the value and the importance of loss, death, absence, and waste – how death, for example, becomes the condition of the system of signs by which claims for subjectivity, of ethics, faith, and art, may be made. This recognition is that of tenderness, recognised in DeLillo's texts not merely by those who "address the world" but those who address the demand to address the world – his artists.

If the commodity has usurped allegory in the modern, postmodern world, then it is a theory of language – in particular, a theory of the economy of language keyed to notions of Otherness, waste, death, and irony as Derrida has, to varying degrees, outlined – that is crucial to a re-thinking of the commodity-symbolic and the possibilities of art and the ethical within such a system. What DeLillo appears to

suggest with *Underworld* is that a thinking of language – a theory of allegory and irony – is what is vital in rediscovering the aura of commodity in a way that demonstrates what has always been true of signs and allegories, that they are tender of, to, and for, better or worse readings, by more or less agent, aware, and tender consciousnesses. In the way in which Benjamin has spoken of the ‘reversibility’ or ‘somersaulting’ of allegory – a testament to irony’s power and presence in all allegory – DeLillo appears to believe in the reversibility of commodity, which is to say, how we may unrepeat our blind repetitions and, therefore, obey the law of *différance* crucial to the tenderness of being and naming as well as what we call art and the ethical. What this means for DeLillo is a renewal of the mourning of Otherness and memory, and with this, a renovation of allegory and language.

Part Two: “Organising Loneliness”. American Allegorists and Mourning.

(i) “We are the Astonishment”

“How human is it to see a thing as something else?” (*U*, 64). The question, posed by Nick Shay, exposes perhaps the central issue for any evaluation of allegory (no less, rhetoric and representation), but also can be read as the question that underpins the entire philosophical undertaking of *Underworld*.¹⁰³ In attempting to answer this question, DeLillo embarks on an analysis of rhetoric – those allegorical and ironic imperatives that, as I have suggested, set out the *work* of mourning. By such analysis, DeLillo attempts to distinguish the commodity-symbolic, the ‘language’ and system of capitalism (with its ‘logic’ of connection, paranoia, simulation, repetition and recycling), against the claims he makes for tender human subjectivity as expressed through the work of art, and that condense around a conception of irony. Such claims, as I shall develop them, that take as their subject the melancholy “fallen wonder” of being-in-the-world and being-in-language, rely, for DeLillo, on this conjugation of irony and mourning, indeed irony as mourning. However, in order to understand the significance of such irony, we must first contextualize it against what DeLillo must see as the hegemonic force of late capitalism, with its “false faith” (825), and its burning off of “nuance” (785) expressed by the reduction of allegory to a technology of the commodity-symbolic. As we shall see, such a reduction of allegory, segregating

¹⁰³ As a corroboration of this we note a similar question posed by the teacher Albert Bronzini to his class:

How is it that a few marks chalked on a blackboard, a few little squiggly signs can can change the shape of human history. [...] I want to know how it is that a few marks on a slate or a piece of paper, a little black on white, or white on black, can carry so much information and contain such shattering implications. Never mind the energy packed in the atom. What about the energy contained in this question? This is the real power. How the mind operates. How the mind identifies, analyses and represents. What beauty and power. What marvels of imagination does it require to reduce the complex forces of nature, all those unseeable magical actions inside the atom – to express all this with a bang and a bang on a blackboard. (735)

Underworld is, then, about what is referred to here as the “real power”, the forces “contained in th[e] question”, in the technology of allegory, theory, and “how the mind operates [and] identifies, analyses and represents”, which is to say, how we, with our allegories, relate to Otherness.

it from irony, effects a sort of systemic and motivated misrecognition (and repression) of both irony and Otherness.

To understand why and how such misrecognition operates at a cultural level is to understand the false mourning and refusal of irony as evidenced by the two mourners and allegorists this section is organised around: Nick Shay and Marvin Lundy. In many ways, this association of an individual's mourning with that of the State's "willingness to act out its own massive fantasies" (421) finds its most singular expression, for DeLillo, in the actions of Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald (one of those "soft white dreamy young men who plan the murder of a famous individual, [...] as a way of organizing their loneliness and misery, making a network out of it, a web of connections"¹⁰⁴), for DeLillo, it seems, comes to express the very logic of commodity and connection he appears to have stood against. In this regard, Oswald is as American as the bomb; both the bomb and Oswald's "absurd" act belong to the same order: operating as a mode of mourning that supplants loss, Otherness and the Other with networks of connection. If the force of this supplanting and connection-making is true to my vision of tender-less allegory then it is also, as DeLillo expresses it, true of what he refers to as technology. For DeLillo, Oswald's desire for the symbolic compensation of webbed connections is an expression of the allegorical force of technology that singles out America as "the only super power on the planet".¹⁰⁵ Which is to say, that the hegemonic force of tender-less allegory and mourning in late Twentieth Century America is demonstrated by the achievement of American technology. As DeLillo puts it, technology

[...] is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on god or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think.¹⁰⁶

What is described as American "power" is, then, a form of mourning understood as the massive force and success of that culture's acts and instances of representation and translation – its technologies, politics, media, narratives, aesthetics, all of which I

¹⁰⁴ See DeLillo's "The American Absurd" in *Harper's Magazine* [February, 2004]. p.32. For DeLillo, it seems, Oswald's actions represent an intensity of what is more generally the culture's need to organise their mourning in response to the exposure to Otherness. As DeLillo says, what was "at stake" that day was "our trust in a coherent reality". Oswald's act, as DeLillo suggests, was "vintage American violence, lonely and rootless, but it shaded into something older and previously distant, a condition of estrangement and helplessness, an undependable reality. We felt the shock of unmeaning" (*Harper's*., 34).

¹⁰⁵ See DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future" in *Harper's Magazine*. December 2001, pp.31-40.

¹⁰⁶ DeLillo. Ibid.

choose to signify by my use of the term allegory.¹⁰⁷ “Our truth” is the notion that we are fated to translate, represent, and communicate through technology, as through allegory, our being-in-the-world. Technology – as networking force, the force of systems and capital – is allegorical; it commutes the mourning of loss or Otherness for systems of connection and commodity production, and to this extent, enables the allegorical ‘organising of loneliness’ I began with.

For DeLillo, in twentieth century American capitalism the condition of being-allegorical has come to resemble a sealed circuit in which Otherness (the power of astonishment) has been replaced by a simulation of Otherness, an allegory created through technologies of communication and commodity production. As DeLillo has said, “we” have, with “our” use of technology, become the “astonishment”, and it is this state of affairs that DeLillo represents and critiques in *Underworld* – a mode of allegory (and allegorical mourning) inseparable from the commodity-symbolic of capitalist production and desire that has become autonomous and complete (in fact, a sort of feed-back loop of connection-making, repetition and recycling), an economy separated from its debt to memory and Otherness. DeLillo’s critique is of a society that cannot achieve the *work* of mourning, nor value the truth of allegory or the tenderness of subjectivity, because of its refusal of irony and consequent failure to treat the Other as Other. This section therefore sets out to examine the significance of irony for DeLillo in *Underworld* through an attention to the analysis of allegory and allegorical mourning, devoid of irony.¹⁰⁸ What shall emerge is, I suggest, a portrait of the commodification and reification of allegory and tender-less mourning.

¹⁰⁷ The role of allegory and naming in the suppression of what DeLillo calls the “the real” (or Otherness) is represented for DeLillo in the very act of naming Oswald; when Oswald becomes “Lee Harvey Oswald”, he is essentially being turned into an allegory of himself. The use of his three names is designed to “produce an early stereotype, a drifter with three first names [...] someone superficially familiar” (*Harper’s*, 33). The use of these names signifies Oswald’s death before the actual event of his death; allegory ‘kills’ Oswald before he is shot by Ruby, but crucially, before he has any chance to be seen as a real person. As DeLillo says, “many people did not want to see ‘the real Oswald’ because they were unwilling to grant fully human status to the man accused of murdering the President” (32). In this way the case of Oswald becomes another paradigmatic case for the treatment, or non-tendering, of Otherness.

¹⁰⁸ The disarticulation of irony and allegory (something, as I have previously suggested, I see as the disarticulation of irony proper) is tantamount to the disarticulation of mourning – without faithful or ethical mourning (a consequence of this disarticulation), Otherness, difference and the chance of art are missed – remembering of course that we can never be responsible for Otherness, only our misrecognitions or translations of it.

(ii) “A Complex Sensation”

Mourning only becomes what we might call ‘true mourning’ (irony) when we recognise the impossibility of its *work*, that is to say, when we recognise the dilemma at the heart of mourning – that the allegorical demand in mourning (the incorporation of the dead Other) is as problematic as the ironic imperative of mourning (the refusal of the name in respect of alterity). This dilemma, as I have insisted throughout this thesis, is what I call irony (in fact, irony and allegory working together). As we have seen through my readings of Derrida and de Man, this irony is also the absence or spacing at the heart of language (enabling iteration, difference, meaning, the ‘law’ of language) that the *work* of mourning demonstrates. What is more, this irony subtends the possibility of what we can consider to be the ethical – the space where we recognise the tenderness of being in language, preceded by Otherness, and where, with cognisance of the Other, we approach language as providing forms of tender, not guarantors of presence, for memory and Otherness. Where language becomes most tender, memory and Otherness are most successfully and faithfully tendered, and for DeLillo (as well as for de Man and Derrida), this is the qualifying demand of literature and art. As I have been suggesting, however, *Underworld* is a portrait of how this irony has been avoided; it resembles a study of a culture’s allegorisation of Otherness by way of its failure to perceive the irony at the heart of mourning.

The movement between modes of mourning, allegorical or ironic, in relation to memory, history and Otherness, is something the novel articulates through the thoughts of Klara Sax in a passage relating to the sense of nostalgia for the politics of the Cold War, and its clearly defined “Other”. In the two quotations that follow, we find Klara, in the first, meditating on notions of allegory, associated with the past, and in the second, considering irony and the present. Furthermore, we note the theme of anchoring that distinguishes the two passages: the first associating the consideration of the Other from a position “at anchor”, where one is able to “measure things”, the second associating the experience of the present with things coming “unstuck”, slipping anchor. If the first passage calls for irony to question and “disarm” the massive force of a constructed and allegorical sublime Other, the second calls for the necessity of allegory to balance against a descent into the valueless-ness of relativisms:

War scared me all right but those lights, I have to tell you those lights were a complex sensation. Those planes on permanent alert, ever present you know, sweeping the Soviet borders, and I remember sitting out there rocking lightly at anchor in some deserted cove and feeling a sense of awe, a child's sleepy feeling of mystery and danger and beauty. I think that is power. I think if you maintain a force in the world that comes into people's sleep, you are exercising a meaningful power. [...] Power meant something thirty, forty years ago. It was stable, it was focused, it was a tangible thing. It was greatness, danger, terror, all those things. And it held us together, the Soviets and us. Maybe it held the world together. You could measure things. You could measure hope and you could measure destruction. Not that I want to bring it back. It's gone, good riddance. (75)

When Klara refers to “awe” she is referring specifically to a constructed sublime – the Other aestheticised and turned into an object of the sublime. In this instance, the sublime becomes a category of allegory. The “power” Klara respects, even admires, is, then, this power of an aestheticised Other; it is the power of a compelling allegory, and as an aesthete she recognises and responds to this power, crediting it as the invention of a sublimity sufficient to the requirements of an entire economy and the needs of a culture, even if it is built on “greatness, danger, terror”. Intervening between this period of allegory and the 90s of the ‘present’ in the next quotation, is that period of radical undoing DeLillo has spoken of in relation to the “American Absurd”. The ‘present’, as Klara sees it, seems in thrall to the force of irony, and certainly this seems to be what she means when she says the following:

‘Many things that were anchored to the balance of power and the balance of terror seem to be undone, unstuck. Things have no limits now. Money has no limits. I don’t understand money anymore. Money is undone. Violence is undone, violence is easier now, it’s uprooted, out of control, it has no measure anymore, it has no level of values. [...] I don’t want to disarm the world,’ she said. ‘Or I do want to disarm the world but I want it to be done warily and realistically and in the full knowledge of what we are giving up’. (76)

Klara’s call here in this last sentence is for the ethical consciousness; by my own terms, such an awareness is dependent on an understanding of the relationship of allegory and irony. If allegory, as associated with the first quotation, is a mode of armament (remembering, as the text often points out, that “all technology refers to the bomb” (467)), then irony is to be seen as disarmament. But at what cost do we disarm our allegories? This appears to be the caveat implicit in Klara’s injunction to “disarm [...] warily”. Essentially, Klara’s concern is to strip back allegorical assumptions while holding on to allegory, recognising in truth what it represents. Without an understanding of what is given up in the ironisation of allegory, we run the risk of asserting the meaninglessness of irony. And so there emerges the suggestion of a dilemma here for Klara: a desire for the “full knowledge” of the allegorical along with the disarmament of allegory as well. Indeed, then, we have returned to the trope of

mourning here and, in so doing, to the qualifying concerns in *Underworld* of art and the ethical: the dilemma of irony. What seems apparent in Klara's concerns is that a theory of irony, for an artist such as Klara, must contain the full knowledge of allegory, and this is what this section is designed to provide – what is given up by the ironization of the culture's dominant allegories. Moreover, this section needs to be seen as a preparation for the demand expressed by the text to see allegory and irony as constituent forces to irony proper.

(iii) Responsible Living

Klara's considerations arise in the context of her art-work in the desert with the B52 bombers, and though Nick's later viewing of the finished work effectively changes his conception of himself and others, as well as his ideas about loss and irony, before this viewing Klara's ideas about representation and allegory appear as anathema to Nick's personal philosophy. An expression of Nick's philosophy is made when he considers:

It is interesting to think of the great blaze of heaven that we winnow down to animal shapes and kitchen tools.

I watched TV in my motel.

I lived responsibly in the real. I didn't accept this business of life as a fiction, or whatever Klara Sax had meant when she said that things had become unreal. [...]

I believed we could know what was happening to us. We were not excluded from our own lives. (82)

What Nick lacks is a sense of how one might think through this notion that things had become "fiction" while, at the same time, holding onto a meaningful notion of the real. Essentially, he needs to see how the fictional nature of things is what makes them real (tender), and what gives them life in the economy Derrida has outlined. Nick comes to this realisation by the end of the novel, but until then he stays within the confines of his broadly Platonic philosophy. Such a "Platonic" allegory qualifies Nick's belief in allegory itself, and we can see how, for example, the television thus becomes the shadows on the wall of the cave, the hotel becomes a sort of hosting allegorical reality for impressions of the world twice removed from the real. By this logic, one's own life becomes merely an allegory for a reality well beyond it. And so Nick's rejection of life as 'fictive' seems to contradict the sort of allegorical or fictional reality he nevertheless subscribes to with his Platonic sympathies. Nevertheless, what Nick means by his phrase "responsible living" is an adherence to such an allegory. What we see here is the likeness of the allegorist and the Platonist.

Moreover, Nick's anxieties betray a pervasive rejection of notions of postmodern or poststructural subjectivity. What remains of subjectivity for such characters is something shrouded in privacy and quietude. And yet, 'I watch TV, therefore I am' is, in effect, the sort of postmodern *cogito ergo sum* in operation here, ironically enough, implied by a character who has just finished rejecting the 'fictive' world of the postmodern.

To go with his philosophy there is also a geography of the "real" Nick lives "responsibly" in, and it is one that demonstrates allegorical control: living in Phoenix, for Nick, means living within the order and bounds of allegory. The Tower Nick works in is at the hub of connections, hooked up to the network and technologies of allegory. The "real" for Nick thus becomes a location, a conceptual space, connected to other phenomena, where history and memory can be placed, treated, and contained. As Nick says of Phoenix: "I liked the way history did not run loose here. They segregated visible history. They caged it, funded and bronzed it, they enshrined it carefully in museums and plazas and memorial parks" (86). History in Phoenix is reified in both the sense of its being made concrete (the bronzing and enshrining Nick mentions) as well as the sense of its incorporation within a system. The way in which he feels 'history' is treated in Phoenix appeals to Nick, not least because it mirrors his own hopes for the management of his own personal waste – his history of loss, the disappearance of his father, his conviction for manslaughter, both of which are linked to his experience of Otherness. Nick needs to have things in their place, and a sense of the control Nick requires is given in the details of his daily routine and his running paraphernalia:

I drank soy milk and ran the metric mile. I had a thing I clipped to the waistband of my running trunks, a device that weighed only three and a half ounces and had a readout showing distance travelled and calories burned and length of stride. I carried my house keys in an ankle wallet that fastened with a Velcro closure. I didn't like to run with house keys jiggling in my pocket. The ankle wallet made me feel there were people out there in the world of product development and merchandising and gift cataloguing who understood the nature of my little nagging needs. (86)

What appeals to Nick is the idea that history and memory might also be tied down, and in this passage it is consumer desire (the satisfaction of all those "nagging needs") that performs this containment. In the capitalist system, one's needs, as expressed by allegories of containment, become, and are met by, commodities of containment. Measurement and containment are thus the two criteria allegory is reduced to in the commodity-symbolic. Things cannot be allowed to "jiggle"; distance, calories etc,

must be measured; even the details of this passage resemble the sort of list-making or collecting Nick, like Marvin, is addicted to, acquiring throughout the novel books, objects, words, and impersonations. As spokesperson for waste management (the collection of waste) Nick is also spokesperson for collection, for *re-collection*, or a certain approach to “memory”.

Re-collection (memory) as a process of waste management, as a purpose of recycling, can be seen as an articulation of the system’s fetishizing of connection – collecting and recycling memory and Otherness as “something else”. As a result, we see how memory becomes subordinate to the allegorical impulse behind connection. And amid the interconnecting grids of telecommunications in the bronze tower, memory is further subjected to containment and control, as something to be monitored or “spied on”.

In the bronze tower I looked out at the umber hills and felt assured and well defended, safe in my office box and my crisp white shirt and connected to things that made me stronger. In the bronze tower a fellow executive cleared his throat and I heard something go by in the small hoarse noise, a secret linger of childhood, the game he played inside his life. Maybe it was a hundred and eight degrees out on the street. He was spying on himself. The third person watches the first person. The “he” spies on the “I”. The “he” knows things the “I” can’t bear to think about. Maybe it was a hundred and twelve, telephones warbling in modulated phrases. The third person sends his nobody to kill the first person’s somebody. (119)

Memory, or what we can refer to as being-in-memory, is something Nick experiences as “a secret linger of childhood, the game he played inside his life”, and though this is an insight directed at a “fellow executive” there is, on Nick’s part, a transference at work here;¹⁰⁹ Nick is seeing himself as someone else, an allegory of himself. Memory and Otherness are then reduced to something detached and allegorical. The force of allegory is something concentrated in the Tower, as hub of connection and technology, as we note the sense that it is the Bronze Tower that has made the hills umber, lending them its colour through its translation and filtering of the world. Clearly, the sense of being connected is what makes Nick feel real, though there is also the sense that the “real” itself remains uncertain; the outside world is referred to through the equivocating “maybe”, and the measurement of the street temperature

¹⁰⁹ The line: “he was spying on himself” suggests this of course, though the pronoun is deliberately ambiguous here, serving to highlight the distance and uncertainty of Nick’s allegories of self – his disorientation among the subject positions in language, and, more generally, the self disoriented by the Other. Nick’s connection of memory and childhood is also significant here, pointing to the moment of radical disruption in his own autobiography (the moment of irony and Otherness associated with the disappearance of his father) that severs his sense of selfhood. The “nobody” sent to kill Nick’s “somebody” also remembers the suggestion that his father’s disappearance is the result of a mob “hit”, but the disappearance of the father is also to be seen here as the defining experience of Nick’s loss of authority in language – and again, the ambiguous use of pronouns in this passage indicates this as well.

appears only as a rumour. But this is consistent with Nick's Platonism, and here again we note the sense of a definite division of inside and outside, and this boundary is extended from consideration of the world in the tower, with the world of the street, to the notion of the self, split between an interior and exterior, a scheme of seeing and seen, a first person "I" and a third person "he". In the absence of a mourning of Otherness that conceives of Otherness as the possibility of subjectivity, Nick becomes riven between the "he" and the "I" of subjectivity – a relationship governed by a suspicion, bordering on paranoia. Nick perceives no continuity between these positions, nor between those positions and what he considers the real world. This split between word and world again recalls the Platonic overtones mentioned earlier, and is related to Nick's later search for a "pure word", explaining also his addiction to the collecting (and memorization) of words.

Nick believes memorizing words and their meanings is the way to "escape the things that made you" (543) such as, in Nick's case, abandonment, loss and death. Yet Nick's attention to language has to be placed in the context of his sponsorship of a petition in support of Senator McCarthy's desire to purge America of the communist Other. Here the "he" spying on the "I" resembles the paranoid, self-monitoring vision of the 1950s inspired by McCarthyism that internalises the cold-war logic of "us" and "them" within the conception of an American self. And this spectre of McCarthyism is telling in regard to Nick's nascent philosophy of language, illustrating a desire to purge the unknown and unknowable qualities of the Other as they might manifest within the borders of the self. Nick's memorising of names, while seemingly indicative of a faith in language, is, in fact, an aspect of his simulation of being-in-language, where iteration (the action of difference within repetition) is replaced by mere repetition, perseveration. By clinging so closely to language in this manner, Nick, in fact, makes himself vulnerable to the ironies of the economy of language; in fact, he lacks a theory of irony. In the absence of a mode of mourning or irony responsive to the demands of both allegory (naming) and Otherness, Nick supplements his collection of names, his language-philosophy, with paranoia, and this is a response, as J. Edgar Hoover is able to recognise, lodged deep in the sub-conscious of the wider culture as a "deeper form of truth". Hoover, master of allegory and information control, explains this with his gloss on the merits of the dossier:

In the endless estuarial mingling of paranoia and control, the dossier was an essential device. [...] The dossier was a deeper form of truth, transcending facts and actuality. The second you placed an item in the file, a fuzzy photograph, an unfounded rumor, it became promiscuously

true. It was a truth without authority and therefore incontestable. Factoids seeped out of the file and crept across the horizon, consuming bodies and minds. The file was everything, the life nothing. [...] Where the current of one's need for control met the tide of one's paranoia, this was where the dossier was reciprocally satisfying. You fed both forces in a single stroke. (559)

What Hoover has to say about the dossier can be seen to resemble a definition of, or analogy for, the dominant mode of allegory (as well as theory) sponsored by the State. Where control meets paranoia it is the appearance of irony or the Other that is the subject, and that is to be controlled. Hoover understands the promiscuity of "truth": that it is an invention and that it therefore shares with irony the mourning of an Otherness it can never completely apprehend. But it is precisely this knowledge of language's incomplete or tender aspect (its relationship to irony, the possibility of irony deep in its structure) that Hoover abuses in the service of ideology and thus sets out to control and manipulate, sublimating irony as paranoia, subordinating it to allegory – the dossier. What emerges here is the arrangement the State – as exemplified by Hoover – has with its constituency, and how the culture is manipulated by a mode of allegoricity (made metaphor by what Hoover says about the dossier) that both simulates control *and* Otherness (paranoia). Indeed, the relationship, as Hoover points out, between control and paranoia, is one of reciprocity – a structure expressed in the logic of the Cold War where the simulation of the Other sanctions certain imperatives of control that further serve to dissemble both the power of the State and the quality of simulation in the first place; the actual Other is never met, is, from the very beginning, repressed so deeply, so efficiently, that no encounter with it is either necessary or possible.¹¹⁰ Such a state of allegorical control, of course, precludes the possibility of true mourning, as with the successful simulation of Otherness irony too becomes incorporated (simulated) within the "estuarial mingling" of the State's semiotic economy.

The understanding Hoover articulates about the power of the dossier to manufacture consent (what he refers to as those "factoids" that consume and are consumed by the culture's bodies and minds) through its arrangement of simulation and dissemblance is also the understanding DeLillo extends to his assessment of

¹¹⁰ Perhaps in considering this last notion we can see how the whole point of the Cold War is that it never happens, but rather, is designed to remain a perennial deterrent. As DeLillo appears to suggest, the power of the war on the minds of Americans relied on its never happening. Indeed, as Marvin says, "everything depends on the superpowers hanging a threat over your head" (182), and as Hoover's quote suggests, such a "threat" – such a power – derives from the astonishing ability of the system/economy to signify allegories of Otherness, indeed to simulate an excess beyond the allegorical symbolic that, in truth, is controlled and produced for consumption via the allegory of paranoia.

allegory as it is manifested within the commodity-symbolic. Indeed, the capacity for the economy to signify through the commodity-symbolic the appearance of waste, excess, Otherness or error is something apparent in DeLillo's recreation of the aesthetics of the game of baseball. As the game-commentator Russ Hodges calls the game he keeps an eye on the advertisement for Chesterfield cigarettes whose first "E" lights up to indicate when an error has been committed in play. It is, then, commodity, advertising, and the laws of consumption, that control the appearance of "errors". Errors, such as they appear within this system, serve to mask the reality of the error-state (or irony) within which commodification operates. By making a sign of errors in this way the system attempts to contain the excess and Otherness that underlie the production of all allegorised reality, and maintain its power in the world. This idea, of course, reminds us of both McCarthy and Hoover, who appear to share a similar semiotic fetish: the signalling of an "Other" within the system so as to maintain notions of purity, inviolability and stability. Thus the baseball game, and this is perhaps why DeLillo devotes such attention to it, operates in the text as a sort of macrocosm of the dominant mode of American mourning – America's "organizing" of its "loneliness" through an economy of signs and commodity, exemplified by its adherence to allegory, to the exclusion of irony and Otherness. DeLillo's representation of the baseball game allows him to represent America's technologies of representation, its relationship to language and world.

(iv) Inoculation and Collection

Essentially, the game is supplanted by the allegory of the game. Hodges is thus one of the first allegorists we meet in the text, and his commentary on the game can be read as a commentary on the allegorising and inventing of the 'real'. Hodges not only presents the game but also its tropes of representation, its iconography and cultural history, its romantic-ideals, and its allegorical commonplaces. He presents a representation of the game: not just what happens out on the field, but also a representation of the game's relationship to allegorisation.

Somebody hands you a piece of paper filled with letters and numbers and you have to make a ball game out of it. You create the weather, flesh out the players, you make them sweat and grouse and hitch up their pants, and it is remarkable, thinks Russ, how much earthly disturbance, how much summer and dust the mind can manage to order up from a single Latin letter lying

flat. [...] When he was doing ghost games he liked to take the action in to the stands, inventing a kid chasing a foul ball, a carrot-topped boy with a cowlick (shameless, ain't I) who retrieves the ball and holds it aloft, this five ounce sphere of cork, rubber, yarn, horsehide and spiral stitching, a souvenir baseball, a priceless thing somehow, a thing that seems to recapitulate the whole history of the game every time it is thrown or hit or touched. (25)

What we read here amounts to an allegory about the invention of allegory, and its relationship to baseball and consumption in the novel. With the force of what Hodges calls “recapitulation” (in this instance, the force of allegory, and the “history of the game”) comes the consolation and comfort of repetition. Russ’s invention pre-empts the actual and engenders a narrative that misses the complications of race, power, class, dissembling, and conflict constantly at work in and around the game – those forces, differences, negotiations, etc., that baseball, in this instance, and as manifestation of the commodity-symbolic, serves to mask.¹¹¹ The faux self-awareness of Russ in his moment of invention (“shameless, ain't I”) sets up a double resonance: the overly idealised and sentimental Rockwellian tableau he conjures (the “carrot-top” with a “cowlick”), as well as the falseness of his own ironic self-awareness (that weak, bracketed “I” that is in fact entirely without “shame”) that, in fact, expresses the shameless nature of his allegory.

What we see here in the aestheticisation of the baseball game, is nothing less than the workings of the commodity-symbolic and its system of false mourning that reduces history to the consumption of allegory-commodities. In the text, the memorabilist and Baseball historian Marvin Lundy serves as historian of consumption and allegory;¹¹² his mourning, and its motivations, his blindness and forgettings, speak directly to those of the system itself. His failures of re-collection (highlighted by the elisions and perseverations of his speech) are indicative of a mode of mourning

¹¹¹ John Duvall makes and extends this reading of the baseball game in his text *A Reader's Guide to Underworld*. 2002.

¹¹² Early on in the novel we are given an image for this coupling of allegory and consumption and its effect on difference and Otherness through the juxtaposing of two racially ‘Other’ figures: here the blackness of the Peanut vendor is contrasted to the blackness of Cotter Martin, a kid (and emblem of an Otherness outside the symbolic of the dominant culture) who has skipped school and stolen his way into the game. The Peanut Vendor represents an allegory of blackness most familiar to the crowd; he presents a performance of his blackness: “a coin-catching whiz”, “black and rangy”, “magnet skinned, circus-catching dimes on the wing and then sailing peanut bags into people’s chests. It’s a thrill a minute show...” He is a “popular Negro and crowd pleaser” (20). The Vendor is popular *because* of his visibility, and as a consequence of his employment of this aesthetic of ‘blackness’ (blackness as allegory) he is a success in the business of vending; in effect, the vendor sells ‘blackness’ as well as peanuts, and his is a history, image, and “Otherness” people are prepared to “buy”. By this notion DeLillo, quite deliberately it appears, runs together allegory and consumption. The point, it seems, is that combined with the logic of consumption, allegory creates and maintains a credulous population; allegory is used as a way of controlling the appearance of the real, managing and containing Otherness. In the capitalist economy allegory becomes a commodity, a consumable.

that turns out, in fact, to be unfaithful to allegory as well as memory. By way of compensation for his failings and forgettings, Marvin substitutes an addiction to collection:

People collect, collect, always collecting. There's people they go after anything out of wartime Germany. Naziana. This is major collector's looking for big history. Does that mean the objects in this room are total trivia? What's the word I'm looking for that sounds like you're getting injected with a vaccine in the fleshy part of your arm? [...] Innocuous. What am I, innocuous? This is history, back-page. From back to front. Happy, tragic, desperate. (174)

The word that Marvin searches for is “innocuous”, but by the way he tries to remember it, he recalls the word “inoculation”, and the point for DeLillo, it seems, is that you cannot, in fact, inoculate yourself against the slippage of the sign, (or difference) in language, and yet, it is this very slippage that Marvin has just demonstrated in moving from “innocuous” to “inoculation”. Despite his best efforts, he is subsumed by this irony. But history *does* become innocuous without its relation to this notion of slippage, as this is the possibility of Otherness – difference, resistance, interpretation, possibility itself. Marvin's collection addiction reduces history to trivia, reduces Nazi history to Naziana, the history of 1950s America to condomology.¹¹³ The collection-addiction can thus be seen as an attempted inoculation against the real Otherness of history. The passage from Nazi history to “Naziana” is precisely that prescribed to allegory within the commodity-symbolic's mode of mourning. Thus Marvin's collection addiction describes his addiction to allegory, but allegory as modelled by the grand narrative of the Cold War. As Marvin says,

You need the leaders of both sides to keep the cold war going. It's the one constant thing. It's honest, it's dependable. Because when the tension and rivalry come to an end, that's when your worst nightmares begin. All the power and intimidation of the state will seep out of your personal bloodstream. You will no longer be the main – what do I want to say? [...] Point of reference. (170)

When Marvin refers to the need to keep the Cold War going, he is referring to the need to maintain a narrative, an allegory, the “one constant thing [...] honest [...] dependable”. In fact, this is the role allegory is consigned, or limited, to, and, in part, this is because allegory delivers the “dependable” in being a category of narcissism – something evident in the assertion of that “you” towards the end of the quotation. This

¹¹³ See Duvall (ibid.). In fact, Condomology is the name of a condom-store franchise whose stores appeal directly to the nostalgia and kitsch of the 1950s. In this way we see how history is reduced to a commodity form (an allegory) that, in the case of the condom, is specifically designed for containment, emblematising as a result, both the collection of waste as well as an inoculation against excess, or infection, that characters such as Marvin, Nick, Sister Edgar, and Hoover all express in their treatment of memory, history and Otherness.

“you” puts the subject at the centre of things and as such establishes a premise for the efficacy of paranoia and the reappropriations (by the subject) it sanctions. For paranoia to work, one needs very clearly defined notions of self and Other, and this, of course, is what the cold-war allegory structure provides, while at the same time obscuring the subject to the conception of the self as Other and Others as selves.

In a sense, Marvin is in mourning for the passing of (an) allegory, for the passing of a time of allegory (the 50s of the Cold War) and innocence before the ironies of the sixties and poststructuralism when history seemed less problematically allegorical. Essentially, Marvin mourns by translating memory into material allegories, making memory concrete; he assuages his experience of loss and Otherness by “naming” the losses with the objects he collects. This is, then, an allegorical and materialist approach to mourning. By making something concrete in this fashion, Marvin is repeating the action of the commodity-symbolic as it functions under capitalism. In this schema, the object is cathected by the ego, is incorporated and thus not considered as object or Other, but as a self-object – repeating the metaphysics of presence. Marvin actually lacks a materialist theory that might in fact redeem his objects (as Other-objects) because of his misrecognition of allegory, his failure to grasp irony. The objects become his history – his “inoculation” against loss and Otherness. By replacing internal elisions and lacunae with material objects, his mourning is essentially one of incorporation – he takes the material world (as translation of Otherness, loss and memory) within himself. In this way, Marvin unconsciously mimics the incorporation and connection-making of the commodity system. In doing so, he denies the object its alterity, and himself the opportunity for a lesson in finitude the object might provide as metaphor for human being-in-the-world.

In contrast to any such lesson of human finitude, the tenderness of being-subject is, for Marvin, replaced by a paranoid grand narrative by which the Otherness of memory, loss and the real is not merely controlled, but avoided. If subjectivity is made subordinate to the imperatives of the economy and desire made autonomous, then at least (as Marvin sees it) one can know oneself in history:

And when the cold war goes out of business, you won't be able to look at some woman in the street and have a what-do-you-call-it kind of fantasy the way you do today. [...] You don't know that every privilege in your life and every thought in your mind depends on the ability of the two great powers to hang a threat over the planet? [...] And you don't know that once this threat begins to fade? [...] You're the lost man of history. (182)

The suggestion here is that to be “lost” to history is to experience the failure of the allegorical as someone like Marvin has too narrowly conceived of it, the failure of history to be expressed through, or knowable as, allegory. Marvin is, however, one of history’s “lost men”, and indeed this explains his massive investment in collection and his addiction to allegory. In a sense, Marvin is a modernist battling against a certain postmodern condition characterised by a pejorative and limited notion of irony. Throughout all his collecting, Marvin is attempting to recuperate or return to a prelapsarian moment, some point in time before things began to ‘fall apart’. Against this drive, moments of memory loss, word-searching (perseveration; see also pp. 175; 179; 188; 192), appear more and more frequently. Without the allegorical structure of the Cold War binary – essentially a framework within which the Other was assumed to be translatable and reconcilable – Marvin experiences erosions of memory and diminishment of his powers of articulation, his grip on language.

Marvin’s anxieties about memory are crucial to his capacity to mourn because they are anxieties born of irony and Otherness, the very *work* of memory (as Derrida has explained). His anxieties about loss mean that he is unable to mourn faithfully, and as such avoids the impossibility at the heart of mourning. When he takes things inside himself (through incorporation, into memory), as all mourners must, he loses them, and thus repeats the loss of his wife, Eleanor, all over again.¹¹⁴ He is incapable therefore of leaving to the lost object (Eleanor) its sense of Otherness and alterity, and to this degree he fails to undertake tender mourning. In a sense, it is the material world that Marvin hopes to hang on to, even though it can never be enough. Although he translates memory into objects, he is never in fact faithful enough to allegory (its relationship to loss that defines its capacity for representation) for his objects ever to become anything more than “exhausted objects”. All that remains for Marvin is the appeal of collecting, that is, “[the] lure of every addiction, [which] is losing yourself to time” (319). Marvin’s addiction offers him “stupefied hours” where time no longer needs to be mourned, or consciously passed. Within the parameters of his allegorical

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“For years he didn’t know why he was chasing down exhausted objects. All that frantic passion for a baseball and he finally understood it was Eleanor on his mind, it was some terror working deep beneath the skin that made him gather up things, amass possessions and effects against the dark shape of some unshoulderable loss. Memorabilia. What he remembered, what lived in the old smoked leather of the catcher’s mitt in the basement was the touch of his Eleanor, those were his wife’s eyes in the oval photographs of men with handlebar moustaches. The state of loss, the fact, the facticity in its lonely length.” (191)

world Marvin is able to lose “[him]self to time” through the temporality of narrative, and in this way what Matt Shay refers to as “time’s own esthetic”(459) (the time of the Other) is avoided. Addiction offers a way of avoiding Otherness; it offers a means of avoiding the experience of temporality, that messianic structure of subjectivity we can also think of as delay or deferral.¹¹⁵ The implication here is that modern consumer society – the system of capital – proceeds on the fashioning and sanctioning of various addictions – indeed, to the purpose of taking the subject out of the experience of time proper (Other time) and placing the subject in allegorical time. To this end, the Internet, for DeLillo, appears as the systemic articulation *par excellence* with its translation of time to the temporality of the connection, where “[a]ll human knowledge [is] gathered and linked” (825) and “[t]here is no space or time” (825). The Internet is to be seen, therefore, as allegory for the impossible collection, the perfect allegory designed to replace the world – the “miracle” (808) or “astonishment” – the final systemic, technological, correction of, or inoculation against, the Otherness of being. Such an allegorical system can be seen as a correction of space and time through the medium of a dissimulatingly transparent rhetoric, a “rhetoric of blindness”.

(v) The Corrections

When Nick says, “[t]he minute I entered correction I was a convert to the system” (502), in a sense, he is referring to the wider phenomenon and philosophy of correction that the juvenile correctional facility he is sent to after shooting George Manza is merely a symptom of; Nick is a convert to the “stern logic” (502) of the corrective system of consumption and commodity capitalism, a convert to a philosophy of language-as-allegory (correction, as I have said) that propounds a theory of naming as a mode of “waste management”, containment and control. Correction, as a metaphor for waste management, can be seen to define the sort of allegory (as I have been discussing it) that is blind to its relationship with Otherness and irony. Correction thus explains something of the force of translation or recycling

¹¹⁵ This is the theory of someone who feels left behind (who has become waste by virtue of an experience of loss), who has no use for time, and for whom depression is keyed to the vastness and insistence of every living second and its demand to be accounted for. Time has become a tyranny for a person like Marvin. Marvin’s suggestion is, then, that addicts are interested in “wasting” time as a way of managing it. The addict longs for “wasted” time (being intoxicated, or out of time), so that time can be missed or turned into something else, used time.

in allegory; it signifies the turning of one's "bad beginnings" (502) into "something else", and so can be seen to express something of the possibility of recovering from experiences of radical loss, irony and Otherness. Through allegory, Nick hopes to recycle himself, to correct himself and drain away the excess "sedimentary stuff of who I was" (502).¹¹⁶

Nick's faith in correction – as a force of allegory – stems from his desire to mediate or translate loss. Allegory is powerfully seductive in this regard, as we see in Nick's thoughts regarding his wife's affair with Brian Glassic:

Brian thought I was the soul of self-completion. Maybe so. But I was also living in a state of quiet separation from all the things he might cite as the solid stuff of home and work and responsible reality. When I found out about him and Marian I felt some element of stoic surrender. Their names were nice together and they were the same age and I was hereby relieved of my phony role as husband and father, high corporate officer. Because even the job is an artificial limb. Did I feel free for just a moment, myself again, hearing the story of their affair? I watch him sleep, thinking how satisfying it would be, ten serious smashes to his prep-school face. But it was also satisfying, for just a moment, to think of giving it all up, letting them have it all, [...] [n]one of it ever belonged to me except in the sense that I filled out the forms. (796)

Nick's earlier claim that he lives "responsible in the real" (his rejection of what Klara described as the point when life became "fictional") seems less certain here, and with the word "phony" Nick demonstrates that he is capable of insight into the tenuous and factitious quality of the particular allegorical dimension he clings to. And yet he cannot refuse allegory either; despite the longed-for period of destructive behaviour and freedom, Nick can't help but be attracted to the logic of allegory, of connections and similarity, and so the rhyme of the two names as well as that of their ages contributes, for Nick, to the sense that Brian and Marian belong together.

¹¹⁶ It's no coincidence then that Nick moves in his life from the correctional facility to a job as a spokesperson for a waste management company; he is an allegorist or aesthete of waste. And it is also no coincidence that he lives in Phoenix either, a geography of correction, and as its name suggests, a place named in memory of a mythical act of allegorisation or recycling. Nick defines the appeal of Phoenix against his experience of California:

Phoenix is a neater package for me. I needed a private life. How could you have a private life in a place where all your isolated feelings are out in the open, where the tension in your heart, the thing you've been able to restrict to small closed rooms is everywhere exposed to the whitish light and grown so large and firmly fixed that you can't separate it from the landscape and sky? (341)

As Nick says, California is "too interesting" (340), with its "edge-of-everything quality that creeps into *innocuous* remarks and becomes the vanguard of estranged feeling" (340). [emphasis added] This feeling is, of course, something we can think of as Otherness, like ironies "creeping" or seeping into language, making history turn from being innocuous to being haunted by alterity and memory. As Nick says, "when I shot George Manza I began to understand the nature of this kind of feeling" (341). As I will show in the next section, this means that Nick is talking about irony. Allegory, as Nick appears to suggest with his commentary on Phoenix, is aligned, and limited to, a force of "restriction", restricting Otherness and memory to the "small closed rooms" of the self.

(vi) Todo y Nada

In many respects the whole question of Nick's faithfulness to allegory and Otherness is to the fore in the scene where he relates his reading of the theological text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, to the stranger (Donna) he meets at a conference and sleeps with. This act of marital infidelity is developed by DeLillo as a metaphor for Nick's relationship to Otherness, specifically, the faithful regard for Otherness and the Other as expressed in the scene's economy of contexts: Nick's reading of *The Cloud* and his search for the "pure word" (allegory) of God, Nick's relation of his secret history of loss and Otherness (the loss of his father, the shooting of Manza) to Donna, and the Otherness of Donna herself. Nick himself appears aware of the Otherness of the occasion, though for him it is inseparable from his excitement and desire. As he says of Donna: "I didn't want to understand her too quickly" (294). In a sense, Nick hopes to stall the processes of allegory, so as to allow the Otherness of Donna, and of their liaison, to wash over him; when Nick tries to kiss Donna, her evasion of the kiss places him "on the outer brow of the perceivable" (294) and we see how Donna's brief act of resistance, a flash of her Otherness, becomes merely an aspect of flirtation – a sort of frisson Nick appears to enjoy. The agenda for this encounter, and thus its significance in *Underworld* is set thus: it is an exercise in, and a flirtation with, the experience of Otherness, and Nick's treatment of this scenario (Donna, his memories, the "*todo y nada* of sex") bears directly on what DeLillo has to say about Otherness, irony and the negative state of loss, and their intersection with the rhetorical.

In many regards, the lesson of *The Cloud* is one that represents what we can see as DeLillo's own philosophy of irony and Otherness, and this is apparent even in Nick's response to the text:

This is what I respected about God. He keeps his secret. And I tried to approach God through his secret, his unknowability. [...] And so I learned to respect the power of secrets. We approach God through his unmadeness. We are made, created. God is unmade. How can we attempt to know such a being? We don't know him. We don't affirm him. Instead we cherish his negation. [...] And we try to develop a naked intent that fixes us to the idea of God. *The Cloud* recommends that we develop this intent around a single word. [...] With this word I would eliminate distraction and edge closer to God's unknowable self (295).

Though *The Cloud* appears to validate the negative state of irony with such emphasis on "unmadeness", "unknowability", and "negation", indeed its association of faith, the very possibility of being faithful, with God's absence and withholding, Nick reads the text as a lesson about "the damage people do when they bring certain things into

the open" (294) – which is to say, he reads *The Cloud* as a parable of containment, a defence of secrets. Where *The Cloud* recommends meditation on God's (the Other's) unknowability through the word, Nick searches for the "correct" word, the "pure word, without a lifetime of connotation and shading" (296), to translate God's absence into a linguistic presence. Essentially, Nick is searching for a word without a history, a word cut off from its referentiality (or memory) – the word as origin, as opposed to *The Cloud*'s teaching of origin as deferral or withholding (irony). Nick's word must be one that has never been "wasted", a word existing before the possibility of (its) death (the possibility of its iteration, its "afterlife" of difference and signification), and so not a word at all.¹¹⁷ The "pure word" that Nick searches for is like no word that could exist; it is a search against language and its structures of delay and deferral, and he misses the fact that this is, in fact, the lesson of *The Cloud*. By not being faithful to the condition of unknowing he is unfaithful to both irony and allegory. Unknowability isn't containment, just as irony isn't merely silence or a secret, rather both, as terms assumed by Derrida's proposition, *différance*, are deeply implicated in the possibilities of expression, naming, and iteration. God, as Other, we might say, keeps his secret so that we might have language, and moreover, understand what it means to have language – to understand, in *The Cloud*'s language, the tender "wretchedness" of our fallen state. And this, of course, is the irony Nick crucially misses: in attempting to search for the "pure word", he has had to commit to the impure and fallen *word* by trawling through other languages and texts, by remembering other words, older words, and family words (his father's "*auito*"); Thus, Nick actually experiences "being-in-language" *because* of the withholding of the Other-word. Moreover, Nick is able to articulate the details of his private and secret history for the first time to another person *because* of the absence at the heart of allegory. In fact, Nick's narrative or allegory (about the search for the phrase *todo y nada*) demonstrates the vitality and necessity of absence in the allegorical, the virtues of 'blindness' of allegory, though this is something he himself is blind to.

Nick's blindness and commensurate unfaithfulness to language are thus acted out in another performance of infidelity in his seduction of Donna. Despite his theory about the Otherness of sex – the "one secret we have that approximates an exalted state and that [...] two people share wordlessly [...making it...] powerful and

¹¹⁷ Nick is hoping to find with such a word the narcissistic reflection of his own condition: he is someone who wishes he hadn't a history, and that he could 'junk' his memory.

mysterious and worth sheltering” (297) – Nick insists on his attempt to discover Donna’s essential, ‘correct’, and secret “sex-grubbed dug-up self” (300), fixing it, as he does so, as an effect of origin. The moment of sexual climax for Nick, is thus, inseparable from the desire for allegorical “mastery”, for naming: “I said her name” (300). With this ironic climax DeLillo completely undermines the ‘mystery’ of sex (the *todo y nada* that is Nick’s allegory for Otherness) Nick hoped to shelter. What we are left with are the ironies of Nick’s misreading of *The Cloud*, his unfaithfulness to his own theory of God and Otherness, his unfaithfulness to both Marian and Donna, but significantly, his unfaithfulness to allegory through his failure to recognise its ironic imperative. Indeed, the whole scene develops around such ironies, all the while presenting Nick’s story about allegory (the search for the “word” is of course an allegory about an allegory – a “pure word”). As such it is irony, as is the case for the entire novel, that becomes the negative state of the scene itself.

Part Three: The Underworld of Irony.

(i) Irony: the Movie Version

1951, for DeLillo, stands in the text as the inaugurating year of loss; with the detonation by the Soviets, somewhere within their borders, of a nuclear bomb (an event Hoover immediately catalogues with Pearl Harbour (24)), something of the inviolability and unchecked primacy of American reality is punctured. 1951 becomes one of those nodal points in the history of the American lives that DeLillo records, radiating the shock waves of deeply embedded detonations in an underworld of Otherness that will no longer be contained, and that will begin to return with more frequency in the coming years. 1951, for *Underworld*, we might say, inaugurates American mourning and “loneliness”; it is a year of presentiment. In this year, for the characters of the novel, reality begins to unravel, becomes less reliable, “unstratified” and more like “fiction”.¹¹⁸ What *Underworld* presents is, then, the ironization of a culture and its forms of history, knowledge, and self-knowing, by an unceasing exposure to Otherness, compensated for by new and improved technologies of connection and allegory, new products, more consumption.

Vietnam is one of those interruptions DeLillo talks about, one of those moments in which American culture, its history (and its allegories) undergoes ironization and questioning. Matt Shay, remembering his time in Vietnam, and how he sometimes tossed a Frisbee for a “Gook dog”, presents the reader with one of *Underworld*’s more explicit considerations of irony:

In the movie version you’d freeze the frame with the dog in midleap about to snare the Frisbee. A park on a summer’s day somewhere in America – that would be the irony of the shot, with a solo guitar producing the bitter screech of feedback. This is what happens when a part of a system’s output is returned to the input. (462)

This is the defining experience of irony for most in *Underworld*, and such an understanding of “irony” (in fact, as I explain, a false irony) is vital to understanding DeLillo’s portrait of America and his critique of representation as practiced within capitalism. The implication here is that irony results from a loop system. Irony is

¹¹⁸ In contrast to such a vision of history is the view held by J Edgar Hoover’s secretary in *Underworld*, Clyde Tolson, whose longing for non-ironic history belies his concerns with a present that threatens

a continuation of the Kennedy years. In which well-founded categories began to seem irrelevant. In which a certain fluid movement became possible. In which sex, drugs and dirty words began to unstratify the culture. (571)

reduced to this “bitter screech” when there is no differentiation in the system between input and output.¹¹⁹ This notion of “irony” represents a dominant or common cultural understanding of its occurrence, use, or context; irony, in this instance, a type recognizable from the “movie version”¹²⁰ of American culture, is a product of technologies of connection. As “feedback” this “irony” becomes what it is through the system’s “recycling” of “output” as “input” – that is to say, through the homogenisation of difference. The point is that irony is misrecognised, and that this misrecognition is a feature of the commodity-symbolic recorded in *Underworld*. The technology of connection, what I have been referring to as the commodity-symbolic (the systemization of allegory), is what produces this false irony, but as we see, without the circuit-breaker of Otherness (precluded by this model of recycling) the irony cannot be irony *as such*. This irony fails, and as we see later, the dog doesn’t, in fact, even go for the Frisbee. Indeed, DeLillo has ‘set up’ this “irony” of the loop (of consumption) so as to document its failure. What we see in DeLillo’s handling of this episode is something he in fact explores throughout the text: the consideration of irony through the demonstration of what it is not. In this way, DeLillo uses irony – as a negative in *Underworld* – to explore the allegorical functioning of the culture and its relation to itself and Otherness. Which is to say, that the compensations of connection and consumption, aspects of the commodity-symbolic of capitalism and its management, containment, and simulation of Otherness, are manifest, for DeLillo in *Underworld*, in the culture’s relationship to irony. For this reason, and as I will show, DeLillo explores irony throughout the text by way of its misrecognition or simulation in the commodity-symbolic. By showing us how irony is misconstrued and avoided, DeLillo extends his portrait of the tender-less allegories and false mourning of late Twentieth Century America.

(ii) Irony, Wasted.

As I have suggested in the opening paragraphs of this section, the management of Otherness is paralleled in *Underworld* by the management of irony in a culture

¹¹⁹ What results here is a kind of non-ironic irony resulting from the loop-system, the seamless victory of the allegorical, in fact a simulation of irony by allegory.

¹²⁰ This phrase, so casually used here, in fact serves to place into relief the other films in *Underworld* that DeLillo uses to further tender his ‘theory’ of irony, namely: Eisenstein’s *Unterwelt*, the Zapruder film, the home movie taken of the ‘Texas Highway Killer’, and Robert Frank’s *Cocksucker Blues*.

dominated by its commodity-symbolic – not surprising, perhaps, for a culture so governed by its media of representation. In *Underworld* the treatment of irony – indeed, the whole question of irony – is therefore inseparable from the constellation of waste, memory and Otherness. When Brian Classic travels to see the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island, he is confronted with a mountain of waste sufficient to such a constellation; the massive garbage heap is a composition of “human behaviour, people’s habits [...] their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their excesses and indulgences but their kindness too, their generosity” (184). Presented here is the excess of memory, everything that falls from the present. To be confronted with this is, then, to be confronted by Otherness, and the question such a confrontation poses for Brian is thus a question about mourning, but one that also articulates the wider culture’s anxieties about this excess: “[...] how to keep this mass metabolism from overwhelming us” [?](184). For such a culture, the Other becomes an “omnivorous movie terror filling [...] doorways and windows” (185). Out of fear the Other is allegorised and ignored: “no one talked about it but the men and women who tried to manage it” (185).

What this means (noting the buried irony here) is that the allegories of the dominant culture come from, and are in fact a response to, waste, Otherness and irony. Waste, in *Underworld*, is the phenomenal manifestation of Otherness that explains the possibilities of paranoia and systems of connection, of theory in general that are the means devised by a culture to control this Otherness. In a sense, waste substitutes as Otherness; waste is the memory, on layer on layer of which, as the garbage theoretician Jesse Detwiler graphically explains, civilization is built. Moreover, what is made apparent in the following is how waste precedes us in an analogy for the way, as Derrida has explained, Otherness (and the Other) precedes us and, as such, the present and the moment of naming are remembrances of things past.

[...] [C]ities rose on garbage, inch by inch, gaining elevation through the decades as buried debris increased. Garbage always got layered over or pushed to the edges, in a room or in a landscape. But it had its own momentum. It pushed back. It pushed into every space available, dictating construction patterns and altering systems of ritual. And it produced rats and paranoia. People were compelled to develop an organized response. This meant they had to come up with a resourceful means of disposal and build a social structure to carry it out – workers, managers, haulers, scavengers. Civilization is built, history is driven – [...]

See, we have everything backwards [...] garbage rose first, inciting people to build a civilization in response, in self-defense. We had to find ways to discard our waste, to use what we couldn’t discard, to repress what we couldn’t use. Garbage [...] forced us to develop the logic and rigor that would lead to systematic investigations of reality, to science, art, music, mathematics. (287)

As we see here, Otherness is taken as justification for our allegories, but our response to Otherness (through allegory) is confined to a language of consumption and product production. “[C]onsume or die” says Detwiler,

[t]hat’s the mandate of the culture. And it all ends up in the dump. We make stupendous amounts of garbage, then we react to it, not technologically but in our hearts and minds. We let it shape us. We let it control our thinking. Garbage comes first, then we build a system to deal with it. (287)

And so we have returned to the looping circuit of “irony” we began with: consumption that creates waste that we react to with more consumption. This feedback loop or tautology – not an irony, but in fact, the result of an absence of irony in the system – is, nevertheless, signalled by the unseen ironies of its spokesperson. Detwiler, the former “garbage guerrilla”, has himself been recycled – “remade, retooled” (286) – into an “industry maverick” (288). The sense of the oxymoronic about this last phrase is telling: Detwiler is both inside the industry and yet also a maverick to the industry. Though he may signify excess or irony with his “japing [of] every complacent rule of belief” (286), he is, in fact, a “guy in firm control, with a work-out coach, and a nice line of credit, in a black turtleneck and designer jeans” (286), who talks like a “talk-show” host (“get to know your garbage”). In DeLillo’s hands, the ironist has become an irony.

Despite the fact that irony, or waste, engenders the allegorical system, the commodity-symbolic nevertheless controls the appearance of irony and Otherness through its systemic misrecognition of irony (as “feedback” and tautology). What then happens to irony in such a symbolic? As Matt Shay, in his own paranoid fashion (again) suggests, irony becomes simulated as paranoia, which is itself an imitation of excess:¹²¹

[H]ow can you tell the difference between orange juice and agent orange if the same massive system connects them at levels outside your comprehension? And how can you tell if this is true when you’re already systemed under, prepared to half believe everything because this is the only intelligent response? [...] When you alter a single minor component, the system adapts at once. (465)

The “screech of feedback” mode of irony Matt articulated earlier is here seen as inseparable from what we can consider to be pure recycling, pure repetition. Any time difference is asserted, the system “adapts”, turning one thing into another – translating and connecting. Through the sheer force and scope of the system’s massive allegorical functioning, the impression of an outside-inside structure is simulated. By

¹²¹ Paranoia, sometimes seen as the voice of the ironist, an insight or tool to decode or break the system, is in fact, a code *of* the system.

this necessary compensatory act – the created impression of something in excess of the system – issues of difference and resistance (the possibilities inherent in irony) are controlled. As we have already seen in Nick’s formulation of his “I” and “he”, like the “Us” and “Them” (51) of a Hoover or McCarthy, the idea of an inside-outside opposition (self and Other) is false, and is, in fact, designed to miss irony and Otherness and thus “organise” American “loneliness” through the economy of paranoid connection-making. Of course, for Hoover, the desired effect of this control of irony is the maintenance of a certain inviolability (expressed for DeLillo through that sense of the autonomous and “astonishing” work of the commodity-symbolic, the economy of capitalism), that for Hoover – like his namesake, Sister Edgar – is associated with a fetishistic concern with cleanliness, purity and the maintaining of certain boundaries and borders. As we see with Sister Edgar, the rhetoric of commodity is also the rhetoric of cleanliness, and yet this language, sponsored by the capitalist economy DeLillo critiques, is not entirely sufficient; the language cannot control irony, and instead tends towards regression:

How can hands be clean if the soap is not? This question was insistent in her life. But if you clean the soap with bleach, what do you clean the bleach bottle with? If you use scouring powder on the bleach bottle, how do you clean the box of Ajax? Germs have personalities. Different objects harbor threats of various insidious types. And the questions turn inward forever. (238)

Indeed, irony itself, we might say, supersedes here, as it is the resistance of irony to language (this language of allegory as a precession of commodity – soap, bleach, scouring powder, Ajax), the excess that cannot be cleaned away, that in fact engenders the modes of “irony” (infinite regression and paranoia) that become the dominant ‘theories’ of irony in the system. This translation, of irony to infinite regression, fails irony by its failure of allegory; that is to say, in not proposing the tenderness of allegory, such a ‘theory’ of irony becomes a version of commodity (something within the system), reified, systemic.

Perhaps the most profound example of this systemic production of “irony” (the system’s simulation of irony as paranoia, infinite regression, connectivity) as a response to Otherness and waste, is to be found in the recycling system of nuclear waste. In the nuclear waste disposal business, as modelled in *Underworld* by Viktor Maltsev’s company “Tchaika”, nuclear weapons are used to destroy nuclear waste. Herein lies the tautology or regression: the waste produced by the production of nuclear weapons to destroy nuclear waste must, in turn, be destroyed by nuclear

weapons. In a sense, DeLillo is here suggesting the moebius-strip quality of capitalism itself; all the force of irony as expressed, say, by Derrida's insights into the functioning of language, and that, in effect, propose forms of waste, excess, death and loss as integral to production and generation of signs in the economy, is here reduced to a simulation of itself, reified in a self-sealing circuit. Capitalism operates 'like' a language, but a language, for DeLillo, whose relationship to irony and Otherness resembles a "false faith" (825) predicated on the simulation of irony through outrageous connection, repetition and regression.¹²² What DeLillo suggests in *Underworld* is that the most powerful simulation of Otherness – in effect, the transcendental signified by which all difference, delay, and irony are made subordinate, as aspects of a dissembling and simulacral economy – is the bomb. In effect, the bomb is the great mid-century metaphor for the radiation of capitalism, the metastasising force of commodity production and dissemination – its spreading of technology, information, desire and allegory. What such a metaphor reveals is that the power of the bomb, the efficacy of capitalism, is a result of capitalism's semiotic structure – its simulation of the structure of language. To drop the bomb on another culture is to detonate one's own referent within that culture. It means contaminating that culture with your own sign system. The radiation that lingers through generations is the radiation (or seepage) of signs: a semi-urgy propelled by the explosion of the referent's semiotic. This becomes apparent when Viktor takes Brian and Nick to the "museum of misshappens" and the local "radiation clinic" (799). Here DeLillo insists on making a comparison between the effects (and consequences) of actual radiation and semiotic radiation, and by doing so suggests the deforming violence of the latter by the observation of the former. The effect is heightened by the incongruous appearance of the hospital's patients who wear T-shirts recycled from a "Gay and Lesbian festival in Hamburg" (800). DeLillo brings together here the deformations of

¹²² With this simulation of irony the Other becomes incorporated, an allegory, a testament to the system's astonishing power of representation. Such incorporation is, then, the achievement of what I have been referring to as a mode of (allegorical) mourning where Otherness is not in fact mourned as Otherness but reduced to a sign in the system. The context explaining this state of mourning in *Underworld* is the disappointment held by a generation of Americans (the generation *Underworld's* main characters are drawn from) regarding the "failure" of the Cold War. The 1950s is remembered as a period of perceived stability because it mourned the presence of an Other (Communist Russia; nuclear apocalypse) it expected to arrive. The failure of this arrival, tantamount to a kind of messianic disappointment, robbed the culture of its dependable allegory of Otherness. What DeLillo portrays throughout *Underworld* is thus a culture's mourning for its lost Otherness – not in fact Otherness itself, but an allegory of Otherness. The system responds by generating an economy that takes its capacity for technology, representation, connection-making and recycling (allegory) as its own sublime, proposing as referents of this sublime, the bomb and, latterly, the Internet.

the symbolic with the bodies of the victims of radiation. This “importing ploy gone awry” (800) rhymes the leakage of the capitalist-symbolic with the leakage of radiation. The T-shirts signify meaninglessness, and in particular, a meaningless form of irony that is the product of the colonization of resistance and difference (Gay T-shirts – themselves once a signifier of difference – in an increasingly Islamic country). It is by such consideration of irony as seen in DeLillo’s rhyming of the leakage of radiation with the seepage of the capitalist symbolic (the T-shirts), that DeLillo is able to highlight distinctions between the capitalist symbolic and the economy of language it is designed to simulate, between the transcendental signified (the bomb) of capitalism and its simulation of Otherness. In the “museum of misshapens” Nick finds himself well positioned to perceive such irony; in effect, he is positioned in the gap between the capitalist semiotic and what such a semiotic is designed to mask: an Otherness embodied in the deformed specimens and patients Nick sees, produced by the ‘nuclear-force’ of capitalist allegoricity. We begin to note a pattern emerging here in DeLillo’s depiction of irony in relation to the economy of commodity and connection. Within the system of connection, the seemingly ‘ironic’ quirk of these T-shirts, turning up at this outpost of (capitalism’s) empire, serves to present a simulation of irony whose purpose is the suggestion of something outside the circuit of the symbolic. In effect, those shirts represent a sort of illusion of Otherness, an intimation of something unmasterable, entirely within the system, but designed to signify something ‘outside’, be it fate, chance, or irony.

So if we see here how Otherness (a certain experience or simulation of it) is keyed to a certain mode or understanding of irony, we find with Sister Edgar’s “helpmeet” Gracie, a further connecting of irony and Otherness tantamount, for DeLillo, to yet another examination of these terms and their relation. The context for this ‘discussion’ is provided in a scene where Gracie considers a busload of tourists in the Bronx whose bus bears the title “Surreal Tours”. On seeing the bus and its logo, Gracie bridles: “It’s not surreal. It’s real, it’s real. Your bus is surreal. You’re surreal” (247). These tourists are, ostensibly, visitors to the “underworld” of the Bronx, though, as Gracie suggests, it is in fact the community of the Wall that is the “real”.¹²³ So there is a kind of inversion at work in DeLillo’s vision of the underworld, and this is made

¹²³ The Wall is, in fact an *index* to reality in America, and DeLillo makes a play of its name later in the novel when the children of the Wall manage to tune a TV to a channel carrying details of the stock market. The Wall, it seems, is more properly “Wall Street”, a more accurate index to poverty, race, class, culture, memory and Otherness than the indices of commodity.

graphically evident when we are made witness to the emergence of commuters from under the road, escaping a subway fire. The figures from the subway are simply more tourists in the real, shocked and at a loss – that state that resembles an encounter with Otherness so often precipitated and triggered by a plunge into some state of emergency. When Gracie says, “you’re surreal” she is making a statement about an Otherness opposed to the manufactured irony of “surreal tours”. We note an inversion at work here also, as it is not the denizens of the Bronx who emerge spectre-like from under the earth, but rather commuters from the city, figures from the system who appear like shades from the *Underworld*:

She thought she understood the tourists. You travel somewhere not for museums and sunsets but for the ruins, bombed-out terrain, for the moss-grown memory of torture and war. Emergency vehicles were massing about a block and a half away. She saw workers pry open subway gratings in billows of pale smoke and she knew she ought to say a fast prayer, an act of hope, three years’ indulgence, but she only watched and waited. Then heads and torsos began to emerge, indistinctly, people coming into the air with jaws skewed open in frantic gasps. (248)¹²⁴

So what the tourists (those from outside the community of the Wall) spectate on, is in fact, the spectacle of “Others” also from outside the wall, emerging from the underworld; the spectators are not seeing the Other, they are seeing versions of themselves (people from the city), they are their own spectacle, they are as much a part of an “underworld” of Otherness as the constructed “Others” of the wall. With the image of these tourist spectators, DeLillo gives us a presentation of blindness where Otherness is missed by a vision circuit or loop that feeds back into a vision of the same, the self – again, a model for narcissism supported by the logic of connection in capitalism. “Output” is returned to “input”, DeLillo gives us an irony of “irony”; the ironising of the notion of “irony” as such a looping vision that in truth leaves Otherness unmourned.

(iii) Shoot and Repeat

Underworld is a novel about connection, in fact, a portrait of sorts, depicting connection as a system radiating out from a constructed, but no less astonishing or sublime, referent. This referent, of course, is the bomb. The economy it “spawns and

¹²⁴ This scene is meant to recall the closing scenes of Eisenstein’s *Unterwelt* (discussed in the next section) where the mutilated prisoners escape from the underground caves into the light of day. DeLillo, again, suggests with this association that the difference between the underworld figures and those ‘surface-dwellers’ of the system is delusional; the point, for DeLillo, is to draw attention to the idea that the construction of an ‘Other’, as with the division of Others from selves, is factitious, motivated, and ideological.

skeins” (51) is the mode of capitalism exemplified by the connection-logic of the Internet. “Everything’s connected,” (289) we are told, and “all technology refers to the bomb” (467), though it is exactly the vulnerability of a society to such dogma of connection that DeLillo sets out to critique or ironize. The way he does this is by associating connection with the bomb, illustrating how a certain desire for connection tends, in the capitalist mode, towards a certain reification of desire and Otherness, in fact, the replacement of desire and Otherness with repetition, simulation and consumption. The point is, DeLillo represents this sort of connective activity through his negative accounting of irony – that is to say, through his depiction of irony’s absence and misprision, its being forgotten. The scene involving Nick and George Manza, is exemplary in this regard, as it presents us with an account of such misprision and misreading of irony.¹²⁵

Nick is who he is for the majority of the novel in part because of the experience of shooting George Manza; his encounter with radical Otherness, made present to him in this experience, becomes one more of those nodal points in the novel that serve to represent the irruption of Otherness and conditions for mourning. The shooting, for Nick, is, then, the third “shot heard around [his] world,” and how he responds to the Otherness of this occasion is indicative of the wider culture’s capacity to mourn, which, as I have been saying, is also an index to this culture’s relationship to irony. The moment of the shooting is itself a synchronic moment – the presenting moment and force of irony – that forever unsettles Nick’s relation to meaning, language, self and Other. After the sudden disappearance of his father, the shooting compounds Nick’s retreat into allegory. When he speaks to Donna of his desire to find a “pure word” alive with “naked intent”, it is because of his exposure to irony and is, more particularly, a consequence of his inability to mourn the moment – “a gesture without a history” (509) – of his exposure to Otherness. This is the case for Nick, I suggest, because of his failure to attend to irony. Relating the shooting to Donna, Nick isolates the experience for certain qualities: the feeling of not being sure “whether the intent was express or implied” (299) speaks closely to the experience of irony, as does his attempt to resolve it in allegory: “I retain the moment. I’ve tried to break it down, see

¹²⁵ We note here a technique typical to DeLillo where, in the actions of a single character, Nick, the tendencies, motives, desires, and blindnesses of the wider culture are represented; to make this point DeLillo sets up the phrase “the shot heard round the world” to rhyme with, and thus, associate, Nick’s experience of shooting Manza and the culture’s ‘experience’ of the Soviet nuclear test, if not also the later ‘shot’ heard around Dealey Plaza.

it clearly in its component parts. But there are so many whirling motives and underlying possibilities and so whats and why nots” (299).

It is precisely Nick’s lack of an understanding of irony that leads to the shooting. The violence is not because of the ironic detachment of nihilism, but the opposite, a complete naïveté about the structure and relationship of difference and Otherness at work in our responsibilities and our decisions, our moral codings of value and ethics, and, at the level of subjectivity, the distinction between self and Other. At the level of information, Nick has difficulty distinguishing “input” from “output”, and without this awareness – something irony enforces by way of its lessons in difference and Otherness – Nick responds nihilistically, as a relativist:

at some point, with my finger already moving the trigger, at some micropoint in the action of the mind and the action of the finger and the trigger-action itself, I may have basically said, So what. I’m not really sure. Or, Why not do it and see what happens. (299)¹²⁶

This experience of Otherness, this “[un]rehearse[d] reality [...] a thing outside the limits of experience” (509) eventuates, as it does, because of Nick’s misreading of what is ostensibly an ironic “contract”, initiated by Manza, between him and Nick. Certainly, violence and destruction are not precluded from irony – indeed, they represent certain necessary outcomes of irony, necessary to the differentiation of other, less violent outcomes – and irony does run this risk, but only in so far as it foregrounds the possibilities of decision and reading (and misreading) in the name of possibility itself. However, a misrecognition of the irony-contract, that is to say, a failure of good-reading (and, presumably also, good decision-making consequent on such reading) is almost always at the heart of violence, and, in this regard, DeLillo’s presentation of the scene of George’s death is exemplary in terms of the requirements for tendering irony – reading well. Nick misses this, though not entirely: he does recall “[t]he way the man said no when he asked if it was loaded [...] the man said no and the smile was all about the risk, of course, the spirit of the dare of what they were doing”(780).¹²⁷ This “of course” stands out as a phrase earned by experience, a marker of retrospection on Nick’s part indicating his recognition of this irony as an adult, but as a young man Nick fails to recognise that the “contract” he signs with

¹²⁶ Another way of reading this, again related to the premise of Nick’s lack of irony, suggests that he pulls the trigger precisely because he is curious about Otherness, curious enough to want an experience of Otherness. Nick’s desire for a repetition of his Father’s absence seems a persuasive reading, and certainly the conjunction of repetition with desire, in fact the translation of desire as repetition, seems a product of a symbolic economy Nick is a constituent of.

¹²⁷ A ‘good reading’, here, is thus one that (remembering de Man) is also a misreading, that is, an ironic reading that “reads” Manza against what he actually says.

Manza when he asks to hold the shotgun is one written in irony, in the language of the unsaid; the outcome, of course, is George's suicide. Despite George's 'ironic' quip that "you shoot with both eyes open" (780), which is as much about the handling of the shotgun as it is about his handling of the situation, Nick fails to recognise and negotiate the irony.

Nick's experience of this moment is marked by repetition. In the text certain details recur time and again: the slyness of George's smile, his answer, "no", when asked if the gun is loaded, the feel of the shotgun in Nick's hands, the pull of the trigger (780-81), and throughout Nick's passage in the text from the 1990s back to the 1950s and the 90s again, details of this event return and repeat. The repetition impulse is essentially of the same structure that American culture (DeLillo seems to be suggesting) begins increasingly to fixate on as the Twentieth Century progresses. DeLillo himself spells this out when he writes about crime caught on video-tape. DeLillo is interested in how "the tape is played and replayed exhausting all the reality stored in its magnetic pores", and how the drive to imitate and repeat becomes "the means [a culture] has devised to disremember the past" giving you, as compensation, "another set of images for you to want and need and get sick of and need nonetheless, [...] separat[ing] you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape".¹²⁸ Consequently, repetition compensates for the "failure" to mourn; the Other and memory are by-passed along with an interrogation of irony, by the reduction of allegory (reduced by the absence of its relation to irony) to a component of imitation and repetition. The more that repetition comes to replace the appearance of the Other, the more closely repetition becomes conflated with, almost supplanting, desire.

For DeLillo (and he has addressed this directly outside his novels)¹²⁹ the central moment of "American absurd[ity]" from which such repetitions flow and to which a certain desire attaches, is the assassination of Kennedy. As I have already suggested, Oswald presented America with an utterly unrecuperable experience of Otherness; for DeLillo, it seems, this was an Otherness to which a culture has largely avoided the trial of mourning, instead reacting through a 'false' mourning composed of the

¹²⁸ "The Power of History", *New York Times Magazine*. September 7, 1997.

¹²⁹ See "The American Absurd": "But think of the outrages and atrocities that flowed from the psychic disorientation of the 1960s – the assassinations, the cult members, the mass suicides. It was surely the assassination of President Kennedy that began to give us a sense of something coming undone". *Harper's Magazine*. February 2004. p.34.

compensations of the allegorical – an investment in the proliferation of signs and commodities (in fact, a conflation of commodity with signs); the consolation of paranoid narratives and plots; the retreat into the addictions of systems, sciences and statistics (Matt, Bronzini, Marvin); retreat into silence (Nick); and the institution of repetition, imitation, and consumption as culturally validated forms of desire.¹³⁰ This last notion, in particular, seems apparent to Klara when she and Miles attend a gathering at which a looped version of the previously unseen Zapruder film screens. The way the film is experienced by those gathered at the screening correlates closely to a culture's failure of irony, its avoidance of mourning.

The film is screened in three different rooms, in front of three different groups of people, with a five second delay separating the first frames of the looped twenty second film shown in the first room from the second room, another five second delay separating the second from the third room. From the initial “ohh[s]” of shock and disbelief at seeing something “completely new” the film sequence re-maps the experience of Otherness (delay and deferral) and the consequent avoidance of it through repetition. The temporal delay structure of the screening and the apportioning of difference in spatial terms (the different rooms) are quickly diminished as people get up and begin to “mix” throughout the rooms. With this detail DeLillo, quite self-consciously it seems, presents the reader with a mini-act of the avoidance of mourning and the conquering of irony through the flattening-out of difference and delay; DeLillo shows us the relationship between repetition and the conquering of *différance*, the economic principle of Otherness, while further connecting to this the

¹³⁰ Of course, the other, unmentioned reaction to the Kennedy assassination is the formation of the ‘counter-culture’ movements of the 1960s, and indeed this too represents a kind of mourning: one that recognises certain possibilities of irony presented in this moment of Otherness, for a critique of culture, history and power. But DeLillo seems equivocal, in *Underworld*, about the success of such movements. The portrayal of Detwiler is enlightening in this regard (see earlier). Detwiler, a product of the 60s, reminds Nick of those at the swingers convention, not only for his rhetoric of disinhibition, his making public the private stuff of waste, but for the way he can ‘swing’ from being a so called “garbage guerrilla” to a simulacral figure of the system he once rebelled against. If Detwiler represents a form of irony, it is a form of relativism that Klara recognises still at work in the art of the 70s, a form that resembles a mimicry or empty repetition of an irony separated from Otherness, a form of irony estranged from itself, from the work of mourning. Here the “moment” is “heroic”, meaning that synchronic moment of irony, separated from allegory, and what results is irony without memory, without any tie to history. This is Klara’s commentary on the art of the seventies, postmodern art:

Art in which the moment is heroic, American art, the do-it-now, the fuck-the-past – she could not follow that. She could look at it and respect it, envy it, in a way, but not, herself, place hand to object and make some furious now, some brilliant jack-off gesture that asserts an independence. (*U.*, 377)

constituent forces of allegory (notice Miles's paranoid quip about the significance of the number thirteen in the film's reel number 313, and his allusion to conspiracy theories (495)) and desire. Indeed, the shock and Otherness of the film are quickly diminished and replaced by a compensatory paranoia. Thus we notice, as Klara does, a group passing a joint, watching the film, amazed "that there were forces in the culture that could out-imagine them" (495). The film becomes commodified as the viewers become "tourists" (495) and Klara notes a "man and a woman [...] seemingly stoned and not especially noticeable, remotely making out" (495). The film runs on amid supposedly "ironic" ideas about "the secret manipulation of history" (495) which have more to do with the allegorisation of irony (as paranoia) than irony itself, while others inure themselves to the effects of the film through the consumption of cannabis (itself a kind of "ironic" commodity). Even details of Klara's narrative begin to repeat (she notes the couple making out "remotely" once again), as attention quickly returns, despite the grisly depiction of the "terrible mist of tissue and skull" (596) to consumption: "let's go eat, or whatever people say when a thing begins to be over" (496). As Klara notes, the film itself marks the beginning of the sixties and the "conceptual end" of the Fifties – the film is the thing that tells us something has "beg[un] to be over", heralding an age of consumption and repetition.

As is evident in DeLillo's treatment of the screening of the Zapruder film, the experience of Otherness by subjects within the commodity-symbolic is quickly diminished; Otherness is translated into the signs of a symbolic system where such signs are fused with commodity. The result is a miraculous and seemingly complete connecting-away of excess. An understanding of irony (and its relationship to Otherness) is, then, what, for DeLillo in *Underworld*, we cannot afford to lose. As DeLillo's text suggests, such irony is indissociable from the requirements of faithful, ethical art, and demonstrates the tenderness of even the most reified of commodity allegories, even the grand commodity: the bomb. By irony, we may tender the bomb, and to do this means thinking again about allegory (its instances of commodity and technology, its force of translation and connection), especially the role of irony in all our allegorical translations and compensations. The genius of the bomb, like that of the Internet, lies in its capacity to approximate, articulate or translate as Otherness itself. The bomb represents the most "astonishing" achievement of our technologies because it was, for a time, the closest we could come to a reproduction of Otherness – in this instance it belongs to the same genus as the army of the dead in Bruegel's

painting. But, like the painting, the bomb is only a reproduction, in fact, a simulation of Otherness, and its success in “out-imagin[ing]” (76) the mind is keyed to its status as a created sublime referent. The bomb therefore is designed to simulate and, as such, replace Otherness. In creating the bomb as a referent of an “outside” Otherness, we create the sense of a coherent and connected society or world. We can think of it, within its time in history, as the ultimate expression of a failure to treat Otherness, via mourning. As such, its massive force – beyond imagining – is the inevitable product of a culture of containment and allegorical control. Because the purpose of the bomb is, as Matt says, to “redefine the limits of human perception and dread” (422), the *work* of the bomb lies in the allegorising of Otherness. But in all of this the bomb is itself an allegory, a sign, and as such, if ironised, can be re-read, re-written. This is essentially what Klara does with her allegorization of the B52s, as we shall see in the next section. Of course Otherness is constantly being mastered and translated. What DeLillo is proposing, therefore, is not an avoidance of translation, but to make those translations as tender as possible – in Klara’s words, that we “disarm” in “full knowledge”. But this only happens when one sees the irony of allegory, that is to say, when one understands the irony that is the *work* of mourning. This irony of allegory is what I suggest Benjamin describes as the turning-about-itself of allegory in the abyss of signification, and it is this, the role of irony in the work of the artist, I shall discuss next.

Part Four: Impossible Work and the Art of Irony.

(i) Klara's Art *Work*

By what impossibility do DeLillo's artists (and here I discuss Klara, Eisenstein, and Ismael Munoz) negotiate a mourning that is faithful to Otherness while at the same time broaching the reproduction, translation, and allegorisation of this Otherness in a way that resists commodification? The challenge for the artist is how to reproduce the Other, to translate Otherness, in such a way as not to foreclose on such possibilities as difference, iteration, and resistance, forces of which Otherness is composed and that are constituent to irony. As we have already seen in *The Body Artist*, to be faithful to one's art is to practice a mourning of Otherness through a practice that amounts to an impossibility – the reproduction of a work's own relationship to its reproducibility, that is to say, the irony of the *work* of art. Indeed, for DeLillo, one can suggest that irony *is*, in fact, the *work* of art, and if it is this idea that is to be found (as I suggest it is) in the work of *Underworld's* artist figures, it is because we find it in DeLillo's own comments about representation, language and fiction.

The context for this discussion comes with DeLillo's consideration of the writing of history.¹³¹ For DeLillo it is irony and Otherness, as forces that explain and help define the possibility of fiction, that are necessary to the "suspension of reality that history needs to escape its own brutal confinements" (62). As such, it is irony ("the swerve from the usual arrangements" (62)) and Otherness that qualify his philosophies of language and writing. Crucial to DeLillo's "unnarrowing of the basic human tubing" (*U*, 538) is his recognition of Otherness as 'origin' to language: "[t]he writer wants to construct a language that will be the book's life-giving force. He wants to *submit* to it. Let language shape the world. Let it break the faith of conventional recreation" (62). Language informs the writer, not the other way around, and this is the experience of language coming from the Other.¹³² But there is a paradox (or irony) here and it is one we should be familiar with as the dilemma of mourning: though it is by language that we may 'record' such an Otherness, this can

¹³¹ See "The Power of History". Ibid.

¹³² This is what DeLillo has said in the passage I have already mentioned from "in the Ruins of the Future": "language is inseparable from the world that provokes it" (34). In saying this DeLillo is situating Otherness (or the "world") as the *a priori* condition of subjectivity and language.

only occur at the point at which language (allegory) becomes, and is acknowledged as, mortified by this relationship to Otherness. The experience of this mortification is what we call irony or mourning. For DeLillo, I suggest, this mourning is to be seen as the demand of tenderness: the articulation of Otherness *and* the name, the transaction of irony *and* allegory at the root of imagining, and what I have referred to as irony itself. For DeLillo it is through this mournful articulation that “consciousness is extended and human truth is seen new” (63). As we will see in the *work* of the artists I discuss in this section, “human truth” – the irony at work in all allegory, in ‘truth’ itself – is what defines, for DeLillo, the work of art, and, moreover, the relation of such art to questions of faith and the ethical.

One of the things that signals for the reader that Klara is to be read as one of DeLillo’s artist-figures, in fact one of his ‘ironists’ or faithful mourners, is the fact that her work represents a treatment of death, a reworking of death to the purpose of exposing the viewer of her art to Otherness and difference.¹³³ In effect, her work becomes an articulation of the impossibility of mourning, the very *work* of irony – as we shall see – performed or articulated within the language of technology, allegory, violence, and consumption it ostensibly critiques. Her work is tender for this reason, acknowledging that there is no outside of textuality, no outside place from which to critique the capitalist system or the allegorical economy of language. In a sense, she is working with the dead (with death) against technologies of death, and we have already seen in the last section something of the ethos that informs her work that, as I have pointed out, resembles the process of mourning.

Because Klara is someone who recycles junk and works with “castoffs” (70), her job is, in effect, one of waste management; her work is done through remembering, and in treating the material that she does she is working in memory (with memory, objects of the past, of history) and with the dead. In her use of the B-52s she is also literally working with the technology of death. As an act of memory, however, Klara’s work is not merely a repetition of the past, but a remembering differently – that is to say, Klara is performing an iteration. To this end she is an ironist; her work makes its subject the possibility of reproduction, and, as we’ve seen with Lauren in *The Body Artist*, what this means is situating reproducibility *in* the *work* of art. For Klara, however, this is done via the ironic method of the *parergon*, an effect I have

¹³³ The relevance of death to Klara’s work is there to be seen in her own appearance; we note the rouge on her cheeks that makes her look “deathly” (67).

previously associated with the *punctum* of the Bruegel painting, where the viewer becomes aware that they are ‘looking at looking’.¹³⁴ The method of irony referred to here as the *punctum* or *parergon* is, for DeLillo, I suggest, what qualifies art against commodity reproduction. The *parergon* is, then, another name for the impossibility of irony – the impossible *work* of art. That Klara’s work is about the *work* of art is something she appears to indicate when asked about her desert-piece:

This is an art project, not a peace project. This is a landscape painting in which we use the landscape itself. The desert is central to this piece. It’s the surround. It’s the framing device. It’s the four-part horizon. (70)

The desert is the subject of her work, not the bombers, and, as Klara says, it is “central to the piece”, even as it is also the “framing device”.¹³⁵ Clearly, then, Klara’s artwork (*ergon*) is about what lies outside the work, or more accurately, the work’s own Otherness, what is *par-ergon*. In so far as the desert represents Otherness, waste, and death, the desert-artwork is “about” the roles of death and Otherness in representation or art.

The desert in the context of Klara’s composition functions as a *parergonal* space making the artwork incomplete, impure and supplemental, and as an evocation of absence and sheer capacity, a site of awe, terror and unknowability, the desert is also to be seen as metaphor for Otherness and memory. In being ‘about’ the desert (“central to the piece”), Klara’s artwork is precisely about the *work* of art, ‘about’ the Otherness art is always situated in. On the subject of the desert, Klara catalogues, sardonically, the received wisdom about its place in a culture’s imagination and how that culture, a technological culture, treats it.

‘It’s so old and strong. I think it makes us feel, makes us as a culture, any technological culture, we feel we mustn’t be overwhelmed by it. Awe and terror, you know. Unconducive’ – and she waved a hand and laughed – ‘to industry and progress and so forth. So we use this place to test our weapons. It’s only logical of course. And it enables us to show our mastery. The desert bears the visible signs of all the detonations we set off. All the craters and warning signs and no-go areas and burial markers, the sites where debris is buried’. (70)

¹³⁴ In a sense this parergonality shares with the notion of the *punctum* the opening onto an “abyss” in which all allegory (and representation), as Benjamin has it, “turns”, but in my scheme of things the play of *ergon* and *parergon*, subject and Other, inside and outside, is very much seen in the necessary relationship of allegory and irony, that in the artwork constitutes its mourning – the two forces instituting a demand to name and represent because of an ironic lack, while, in turn, instituting a further demand to name or iterate.

¹³⁵ The irony of the *parergon* can be thought of as the foregrounding and centrality of the frame in the work of art, the placing of the outside (*par*) inside the work (*ergon*).

The desert, in so far as it is the burial ground and test site for a culture's systems and technologies, is also, therefore, the space (of memory and Otherness) that makes such allegorical constructs possible; in this Other-space signs are seen as "burial markers", as carrying within them (as Derrida has shown) the mark of their death. A work that takes Otherness as its subject, as Klara's does, will make this understanding part of its revelation. The place of the Other and the place of the sign are, in effect, one and the same, since the sign is always a deferral and delay *of* this Otherness. As we have already seen in this thesis, an art-*work* like Klara's, in part, earns the title 'work of art', because of what it reveals about its production and its debt to the impossible Other. In rhetorical terms, this *work* is articulated through an examination of the relationship of irony (Other) and allegory (sign), and when Klara says her work is "an art project, not a peace project" she is, in effect, indicating how central this relationship of sign and Other is to her work. But she is only able to examine this relationship because, in the first instance, she recognises in the desert an ironic space *par excellence*. Thus, in making the desert the "central" (parergonal) focus of her work she is able to empty the work of the encumbrances of content (that it is about "peace", or war or landscape) and articulate more 'economically' her critique of the ways in which Otherness has been treated through the allegories of the dominant commodity-symbolic – indeed, the ways in which Otherness has been subjected to a semiotic structure (like language) whose greatest allegories are also its armaments and weaponry. In the manner specific to irony, Klara uses such weaponry (the B-52s) as the 'language' in which she performs her critique of the production of such weapons or allegories.

In this regard, Klara's artwork resembles an investigation into something like the structure of language – the play of naming and repetition, absence and presence, towards a concept of mourning. We see, then, that the notion of "unrepeating" is important for her as *work* directed against incorporation, and specifically the incorporating technology of the system capable of reproducing the power of allegory *as* weaponry.

'See, we're painting, hand-painting in some cases, putting our puny hands to great weapons systems, to systems that came out of the factories and assembly halls as near alike as possible, millions of components stamped out, repeated endlessly, and we're trying to unrepeat, to find an element of felt life, and maybe there's a sort of survival instinct here, a graffiti instinct – to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are. The way the nose artists did, the guys who painted pinups on the fuselage'. (77)

The B-52s stand in for allegorical language, for a certain philosophy of language that has become inseparable from the technology of a culture. Moreover, the bombers stand in for the uniformity of the fifties, signifying a period of homogeneity and lack of difference. Against this Klara wants to reaffirm the signature, the mark of the self, idiosyncratic, and different, the mark of an-Other she refers to as the “graffiti instinct”. By hand-painting the aircraft, Klara’s crew are making the bombers different from one another, they are unrepeating the repetition of the aircraft’s production, ironizing uniformity, conformity, and repetition, and reasserting difference in reproduction. By using the bomber, Klara manages an irony – using the language of the system (the planes signify as lexical items of this system) to speak to, and within, the system. Within the historical fact of the system’s reproducibility (as evident in the fields of discarded bombers) Klara inserts difference as an aspect of reproduction itself – precisely what she sees as missing within the symbolic or language capable of producing such weaponry. Klara’s work thus resembles a version of “recycling” that is better described as irony. This notion of recycling is a test for art in the text, and a notion to contrast against other motifs and explanations of recycling within the connecting system. So, rather than turning junk into product or commodity, Klara uses waste to speak about this model of recycling, turning waste (in fact composed of the signs, figures of the old technological system – its language) into a new language capable of reflecting on itself and its conditions of possibility and signification. The Bombers, as commodities and as allegories, are reversed on themselves, becoming allegories again in the afterlife of allegory. This afterlife is no less than the possibility of the sign’s iteration, the possibility I have been associating with the death (and waste) of the sign, the ironic principle that animates allegory in the first place.¹³⁶ The ability of an artist to demonstrate this “afterlife” of a sign, allegory, or commodity, its self-reflexivity (its irony), is what separates art and the ethical in *Underworld* from repetition, recycling, and the collection-addiction – is, in fact, what qualifies the better (more tender) forms of these.

¹³⁶ What results from this sort of irony is a kind of melancholy art – a basis for ethical and ‘Otherwise’ consideration grounded in meditation on human finitude, consistent with Benjamin’s reading of the *Trauerspiel*, but consistent also with DeLillo’s concluding pages in the novel, especially as evinced through Nick Shay (after he and Marion have viewed Klara’s artwork) and his thoughts on the tenderness of his objects. No coincidence, then, that Benjamin’s thoughts on the “play of mourning” (*Trauerspiel*) should turn up in a novel of mourning, nor in one so clearly in tune with Derrida’s thoughts on memory, Otherness, language and mourning. These considerations shall be the subject of my concluding section.

The effect of perceiving such work, as displayed through Klara's representation of the artwork's relationship to Otherness, loss, impossibility, is revelatory: after seeing the work Nick and Marian become aware of the tenderness of allegoricity as never before. In fact, they become irony-conscious: "Everything [they] saw was ominous and shining, tense with the beauty of things that are normally unseen, even the cars gone to canker and rust" (126). Such is the vision afforded the ironist, a vision of mourning where "canker" and "rust" are to be read as signs of death (the mortification of the sign), of the passing away of presence. The beauty of the unseen is therefore exactly the beauty of the lost (the excess, the dead), the beauty of memory (composed by such experience), and as such, this beauty qualifies as the strong possibility of irony. As we will see in my next section, the experience of seeing Klara's artwork has a profound effect on Nick (and his relationship with Marian), and like the effect *Unterwelt* has on Klara, the experience of Otherness such artworks convey turns both Klara and Nick into spokespeople for DeLillo's melancholic philosophy of mourning. Nick, we note, records this experience as being like "some endless sky waking inside me" (126). This phrase (recalling the concluding frames of the Eisenstein film) serves as one of the most economical expressions of the experience and condition of Otherness: as being like both the endlessness of sky that we are situated in, and this endlessness internalised "in us" at the same time. For Marian, also, a transformation is recorded when she says, "I can never look at a painting the same way again" (126), and in truth neither Nick nor Marian will see anything "the same way again"; they have been shown something unseen, through the mortification of the allegorical, something impossible – like irony. In the visual realm, the unseen or unseeable is equivalent to the unspoken so often assumed to be the qualifying experience of irony.

(ii) Reproducibility

Some readers of *Underworld* have seen the challenge or qualification of art, posed by DeLillo in his novel, as a proposition framed by the issue of repetition. Specifically, that art must, as a critic like Osteen¹³⁷ asserts, be somehow unrepeatable, but I assert that repetition is, in fact, unavoidable, that art will come to be mastered, repeated as product or commodity and that what DeLillo is really asking is about a better

¹³⁷ See Osteen's *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*. 2000.

definition of repetition,¹³⁸ a definition faithful to Derrida's distinction between a "dull archiving" and an economy of iteration. By this latter understanding we will be talking about memory rather than mere repetition, and will have at the same time distinguished the 'bad faith' of capitalist recycling and repetition. With the inclusion in *Underworld* of films such as the Zapruder film, or the footage of the "Texas Highway Killer", DeLillo is, in effect, asking the reader to make a comparison between these films and Eisenstein's *Unterwelt* (so clearly validated as 'art' in the text), and more generally, with the other "artworks" of *Underworld* such as Klara's 'B52s', Ismael's graffiti and billboard painting of Esmeralda, Rodia's Watts Towers, and Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death*. To make such a comparison is to the purpose of an investigation of this issue of repetition, and specifically because, at some level, the assassination of Kennedy – its footage – shares an unrepeatable realness with these other events, performances, or works we label art. What DeLillo seems to be suggesting is that a tender theory of art (of art's articulation of Otherness) might well be made through a certain examination of the qualities of repetition as enshrined within the commodity-symbolic. Moreover, a test case for this might be made in the consideration of how 'works of art' in *Underworld* repeat Otherness differently from the way the Zapruder film does.

The Zapruder film will be lost to repetition (and, as we've seen, *Underworld* records the film's translation into commodity), but this is not because of the film itself. As Klara notes, the film on its own terms has an unmasterable quality that bares the viewer to an Otherness later associated with the effect of viewing *Unterwelt*. The film becomes commodified because of the culture's failure to mourn the Otherness represented in the film; the film is turned into an occasion for the misprision and mastery of Otherness through repetition. In this regard the film becomes an exemplary instance of the commodity. A theory of repetition that doesn't define itself against its commodity form, and that assumes a definitive place in the proposition of what art might or might not be, will fail to distinguish the film of an assassination or murder from the film of an artist such as Eisenstein; it will – and this is precisely what Osteen misses and DeLillo critiques – make equivalent, and thus diminish, the difference between random violence and the imagining of Otherness I have associated with the

¹³⁸ What I suggest DeLillo seeks is a definition of repetition that sees it as a mode of reproduction within the postmodernism of late capitalism that retains a relation to aura and Otherness without having to resort to a transcendental theory of art, but, rather, conceives of Otherness as a possibility within the same system or economy that produces the commodity.

ethical and with art. Without this distinction, irony becomes merely relativism, meaning that irony, in fact, ceases being ironic, or cannot be perceived as irony. What results, as we have seen, is the sort of absurd violence Nick experiences when he fails George Manza's 'test'. This is the risk of irony and precisely the reason why this issue of repetition is crucial to DeLillo's investigation of irony and its links to memory, representation, language and Otherness. The issue of repetition and the tendency for iteration to be turned to commodity production is, for the question of irony, within the period of late capitalism, the most pressing issue. As such, I argue, and this is also what I suggest DeLillo intuits, it is also *the* issue for art in the so-called postmodern. How can art, in late capitalism (and this is the question Osteen *does* importantly pose in his reading of DeLillo's texts), avoid becoming commodified? The answer, as I will come to suggest, lies not so much with an avoidance, but with a Benjaminian re-evaluation of commodity, as better or worse, tender or less tender (which is to say, ironised) instances of allegory.

For DeLillo, it seems, the assassination of Kennedy is to the experience of everyday American reality what the lurch into the poststructural is to the experience of language and, consequently, the "self". Arguably, *Underworld* historicises this "lurch" as the ironic force of undoing which the dominant culture seeks to 'manage' through its technologies of allegory. Although, as I argue, DeLillo appears to celebrate the poststructural for its lessons about human tenderness, such a view relies on a return to that irruptive moment on Elm Street, in particular, to the work of distinguishing between Otherness and commodity that, by virtue of the very reproducibility of this moment (the Zapruder film) we must perform. No surprise, then, to find one of DeLillo's principal artist figures (Klara) considering the Zapruder film:

But the movie in fact was powerfully open, it was glary and artless and completely steeped in being what it was, in being film. It carried a kind of inner life, something unconnected to the things we call phenomena. The footage seemed to advance some argument about the nature of film itself. The progress of the car down Elm Street, the movement of the film through the camera body, some sharable darkness – this was a death that seemed to rise from the streamy debris of the deep mind, it came from some night of the mind, there was some trick of film emulsion that showed the ghost of consciousness. Or so she thought to wonder. She thought to wonder if this home movie was some crude living likeness of the mind's own technology, the sort of death plot that runs in the mind, because it seemed so familiar, the footage did – it seemed a thing we might see, not see but know, a model of the nights when we are intimate with our own dying. (495)

The Zapruder film, while not intended as a work of art, becomes important to the novel for what it nevertheless communicates to Klara about the *work* of art, and this is

because, in a sense, the film captures the central experience of Otherness America mourns throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century. Ostensibly, this ‘mourning’ is the subject matter of *Underworld*, and though precipitated, for example, by the 1951 Soviet nuclear test, the events of that November day in 1963 represent perhaps the most singular and condensed expression and experience of Otherness, changing indelibly the culture’s conception of reality and irony; it is a poststructural moment before poststructuralism, and this is what is articulated, as we have seen, by a character like Clyde Tolsen in *Underworld*.

Moreover, the Zapruder film demonstrates something about the workings of the artist’s mind and the relation of unconscious and Other forces to issues of consciousness and representation. Through Klara’s eyes, the Zapruder film exhibits an irony – a self-awareness (an “argument about film itself”) as well as an ironic absence – a hole or *punctum* or *parergonal* quality (like that “trick of film emulsion” an effect of mortification, showing the “ghost of consciousness”), as we have seen, that Klara later turns into the ‘subject matter’ of her own artwork. Klara produces a tender reading of the film, a tender repetition we might say, notably, contrary to the repetitions observed by many of those other party-goers she watches the film with. Essentially, with her viewing of the film, Klara demonstrates a sort of reversal of its commodity status (even as, in another sense, with its looping repetition she is witness to its diminishing aura): she ‘unrepeats’ the film by attempting to see it as a thing-in-itself (as allegorical) and, in so doing, discovers its “inner-life” (what we might think of as the source of its “after-life”) notably “unconnected” to the phenomenal. DeLillo’s use of that word (“unconnected”) in a novel that so often repeats its opposite (“everything connects”) is conspicuous, and with this word he is, in effect, locating in the Zapruder film what Klara’s desert artwork, along with Eisenstein’s *Unterwelt*, demonstrates, a kind of irony (I’ve described above as a *punctum*) that addresses an Otherness that we can “not see but know” (495). This unseen ‘something’ is what the fool in Bruegel’s painting is also looking at, an absence gestured to by the film, a hole in its representing that is a part of its representing, that at the same time draws attention to both a sense of itself (as film, a self awareness), as well as an Otherness (that looks at the film and looks at the film’s looking) from beyond its frames.

As Klara sees it, this is a film that advances an argument ‘about’ film, but also, I suggest, an argument about irony and art; and all the more so since it appears to

allegorise the workings of the artist-mind and that mind's necessary relationship to possibility itself, death. The film¹³⁹ displays the "mind's own technology" – that is to say (remembering how technology is associated throughout *Underworld* with allegory), the working of allegory – itself keyed to "the nights where we are intimate with our own dying". Death and the unconscious, both passwords for Otherness in this case, have dominion here; note DeLillo's inversion where it is "consciousness", not the unconscious, that is "ghosted". So the film, to Klara's eyes, is about the role of death in imagining and representation. The film reminds Klara how representation, and allegory, for example, rely on, or are necessarily related to, death, finitude, and limitation; this is the insight I attributed to Bruegel's great work, but is also the basis for DeLillo's politics of art, as I shall explain in my next section. The film illustrates, in a sense, how history can become a commodity, but also how this process elides the "unconnected" essence (irony, Otherness) at the core of the film (and history). That "everything connects" needs to be seen, after Klara's reading of the film, as epiphenomenon of the possibility of "unconnection", and allegory, as possibility of death, as epiphenomenon of irony.

(iii) *Unterwelt*

Unterwelt presents DeLillo's reader with one of the novel's chief examples of impossible or ironic mourning as art. In a sense, we 'read' *Unterwelt*, not only as an advancement on DeLillo's association of irony and Otherness treated through representation, but also as yet another artwork by which to glean the philosophy of DeLillo's own ethics of art and writing. *Unterwelt* speaks to the condition of being-in-Otherness, and its valorisation in the novel is the result of what I see as DeLillo's endorsement of Eisenstein as ironist, and *Unterwelt* as a dramatization of the possibilities of irony.¹⁴⁰ A sense of the ironies to follow in the film begins with the

¹³⁹ We note a sort of anthropomorphism at work here, too, where the camera body becomes the human body, the head perhaps; the film itself becomes the "streamy debris" of the unconscious occasionally "ghosted" by consciousness – the mind.

¹⁴⁰ In a sense *Unterwelt* can be usefully compared with Robert Frank's *Cocksucker Blues*. Ostensibly a record of the 'ironic' and 'rebellious' members of the *Rolling Stones* attempts to defy anything that might be considered normative, conservative, or consumerist behaviour, the Frank film is, in fact, a record of the band's capitulation to behaviour entirely consistent with the world of commodity and consumption. If *Cocksucker Blues* records the way the band and its ideas of resistance become consumed by allegory, then *Unterwelt* moves in the opposite direction, beginning from a "state" of allegorical control and repression and moving to scenes of exposure and transgression of such control,

choice of the film's venue: Radio City Music Hall, a testament to the Art Deco dreams of technology and control with its "burnished steel and chrome [...and] machine-age completion" (423), is also home to an underworld of kitsch seen in the mural in the lobby depicting "[a]mber mists, a cloaked old man with a staff, a cluster of flamingos standing in the alpenglow" (423). Such a display of excess sets the tone for the screening of a film whose themes of transgression, dissembling, inversion and contradiction are enlisted in its investigation of Otherness, of "people living in the shadows" (424).¹⁴¹ Thus, Klara notes: "[t]here was an ambivalence that vitalized the crowd [...] [y]ou were here to enjoy the contradictions. Think of the relationship between the film and the theatre in which it was showing – the work of a renowned master of world cinema screened in the camp environment of the Rockettes and the mighty Wurlitzer" (425). The film, a "subversive venture" (426) and "cross-dressing event" (428), is thus preceded by a floor show of "farcical bravado": the Rockettes appear, though they may in fact be "female impersonators", bearing "slave collars and doing routines with such pulsing sexual rhythm" (428). When a live video shot of the dancers taken from a camera in the flies is projected on a back screen, the audience is shown how "a crowd is reconfigured, teased into methodical geometry, into slipknots and serpentines" (428), and this anticipates what the film articulates about State control and repression through allegorical configurations – allegories *Unterwelt* attempts to transgress and complicate.

The film itself depicts the work of a "mad scientist" who conducts experiments in an underground cave system on a group of prisoners. The scientist's experiments, designed, it seems, to transform or mutate his patients, have produced deformities and mutilations. The allegory here (transfiguration) is, of course, one about allegory itself – turning something into something else – and can be read as a commentary on the State's philosophy of correcting dissidence, deviance, and difference.¹⁴² In their monstrosity, these figures represent not so much Otherness as the mutilating force of allegory gone awry – the result of the State's attempt to allegorise Otherness out of public consciousness. Later in the film the prisoners manage to escape their cave-prison and emerge into a landscape "shocked by light, pervasive and overexposed [...]

suggesting a sort of revelation of Otherness through the irony of Eisenstein's technique. Both films are about irony, we might say, but each film pursues opposite trajectories.

¹⁴¹ State repression of artistic expression and homosexuality are, of course, the films major themes, though these are the specificities of what is more generally a film about Otherness.

¹⁴² In effect, this is something like the notion of correction that appeals to the young Nick as the virtue of a "correctional institution".

fires in the distance, the horizon line in smoke and ash” (442) (Bruegel, again), and with this, Eisenstein more fully begins his complication of the film’s treatment of this “movie terror” Otherness.¹⁴³ This seems apparent in what amounts to a debunking of the Platonic allegory of reality since the deformities of the prisoners, until this point confined to the cave, match the devastated reality of the landscape; what has been repressed in an underworld is in fact a truth of the overworld. The point is that Otherness persists beyond the dictates of the sort of definitive and carceral allegory the scientist and State apply to the prisoners. Despite the deformities that ostensibly signify the prisoners as Other, Eisenstein, as Klara notes, imagines these “creatures” as “fully human” (430). Indeed, in a brief moment of tenderness that disrupts the sort of allegorical containment of Otherness the film represents, the division of scientist and Other is collapsed when the scientist touches one of the prisoners “tenderly on the cheek” (432). The moment is fascinating to Klara, as it so clearly ironises the allegorical stratification of ‘us’ and ‘them’, underworld and overworld. But also because the scientist’s gesture, as Klara considers it, represents a “shrouded” reference to Eisenstein’s homosexuality, his own Otherness or difference that is encoded, or exists, underneath his use of allegory. The effect of Eisenstein’s film is to suggest that Otherness *is* the environment or landscape in which we live, and that the Others Eisenstein depicts in this film live in excess of allegory:

These deformed faces, these were people who existed outside nationality and strict historical context. Eisenstein’s method of immediate characterization, called *typage*, seemed self-parodied and shattered here, intentionally. Because the external features of the men and women did not tell you anything about class or social mission. They were people persecuted and altered, this was their typology – they were an inconvenient secret of the society around them. (443)

In effect, Eisenstein eschews his own allegorical method, “*typage*”, in a film that sets out to present the audience not with more allegories, but with irony – the film is a presentation designed to constantly undermine its representing force of resistance, difference, distance and Otherness. As Klara notes, “the camera angle is a kind of dialectic. Arguments are raised and made, theories drift across the screen and instantly shatter – there’s a lot of opposition and conflict” (429). The “shattering” of allegory (theories) explains Eisenstein’s problematization of narrative and content in the film: there is “no plot” (430), but rather a dialectic of seeing and being seen. The

¹⁴³ The phrase comes from Brian Glassic’s assessment of the Otherness of the waste mountain, but ties in with Klara’s connection of Eisenstein’s film with the “radiation monsters of Japanese science-fiction movies” (430) and the American monster movies of the 1950s that came to allegorise, make metaphorical, and rehearse for the culture, a mastery of Otherness.

claustrophobia that results from the film's embedding of the "viewpoint of the prisoners" implicates the audience as Others themselves.¹⁴⁴ Such is the film's ironic presentation that Klara wonders "[h]ow and when it would reveal itself", but of course the film (a silent film) is designed to leave its viewer in the very space of the unsaid, the unexplained of irony – this is its theme, its mode of addressing Otherness.

After the film Klara emerges (like one of the prisoners) into the real 'daylight' world of the city with a feeling of her Otherness – estranged from her own norms of seeing, her own schedule and catalogue of allegories of the world.¹⁴⁵ The film is "printed on her mind" and she wears it "instead of a skirt and blouse" (445). Klara experiences a detachment and distance from the world and those around her, not being in the present with her friends, and unable to join in the conversation her friends are having, but realizing that what the film was about, Otherness (Otherness beyond the pronouns of "us" and "them" (444)), was now, like the movie, "all around her" (445). This sensation is the triumph of Eisenstein's art – an ironization of the everyday, of "being", and of the forms, systems and technologies that mediate the real and the Other. Klara feels the sensation of a new way of seeing and thinking – all of the givens of allegorical consciousness have been ironized.

All Eisenstein wants you to see, in the end, are the contradictions of being. You look at the faces on the screen and you see the mutilated yearning, the inner divisions of people and systems, and how forces will clash and fasten, compelling the swerve from evenness that marks a thing lastingly. (444)

The "contradictions" here are perhaps those that reveal how one is a *you*, an *other* and an *I* as well as collectively an *us* and a *them*. Eisenstein's point is thus to show how this is contradicted by a certain sense of ontology and its allegorical expression. "Mutilated yearning" is another expression of the "longing" that DeLillo records throughout *Underworld*, and that he associates with the making of history (11). What this reference suggests is that all history – as with all allegory – is a form of

¹⁴⁴ The effect of the film, resulting from the claustrophobia generated by the director's control of the point of view, gives Klara's friend Jack reason to comment: "I bet you'd give a hundred dollars to stand in the rain right now and smoke a cigarette" which DeLillo rhymes with the film's "figures moving upwards through gouged tunnels into a dark rainy night" (441). The film is shown to demonstrate to the audience their own membership as the transfigured and allegorised masses (something the camera shot of the dancers also demonstrates) as Others themselves.

¹⁴⁵ Klara records this sense of Otherness as like that "curious loss you used to feel as a child when you walked out of a movie house into the middle of the day and the streets were all agitation and nasty glare, every surface intense and jarring, people in loud clothing that did not fit" (445).

mutilation, misprision, and transfiguration.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, we might say that such “mutilated yearning” describes the ‘truth’ of our attempts to represent ourselves and others; yearning is mutilated because it is mediated by language, by delay and deferral, but rather than repressing this knowledge, Eisenstein’s film achieves its effect – that “swerve from evenness” – because of it. For this reason, the film ends with the image of a prisoner’s face shedding its deformities, and undergoing a further “transfiguration”, appearing to heal, grow younger, paler, and finally, dissolve into the landscape. This second transfiguration stands for the iteration of allegory, its turning, once again, into something else, suggesting the afterlife of allegories when conceived of in their relation to irony, as tender for Otherness. With this final scene the film’s point of view (previously “embedded” in the ‘looking’ of the prisoners) is reversed with the close-up of the dissolving face, and as such the ‘Other’s’ face gazes back down the camera to the audience, leaving them with the vision of a landscape (what Nick describes as the “endless sky waking inside me”) – the world as Other that looks back.

This “looking back”, that amounts to the tender appraisal of our representational assumptions (our ‘looking at looking’) is now familiar to us as the *punctum* or irony DeLillo associates with his works of art, and again it is what we find in perhaps the most hidden artwork of the text – Munoz’s “Esmeralda”. People gather around an empty billboard when it is discovered that, when lit from behind by a passing train, the face of the dead Esmeralda appears and then vanishes again with the train’s passing. The ‘apparition’ of Esmeralda is, I suggest, one more act of graffiti by Ismael painted on the undersheet of a billboard, designed to be as impermanent as the rest of his work – “the art that can’t stand still” (441). Indeed, Ismael’s previous work with trains, and his penchant for using the tools of the system to serve as medium and canvas, would appear to support this suggestion. As Ismael recognises: the trains enable his work to be “everywhere in the system, and you get inside people’s heads and vandalize their eyeballs” (435). Moreover, Ismael has a kind of ownership of the trains, and we come to expect that the train that illuminates the billboard “was one of his” (433). The billboard presents as yet another *punctum* moment for the reader of *Underworld*. For DeLillo, it seems a self-conscious strategy designed once again to

¹⁴⁶ In effect, the ‘dialectic’ of Eisenstein’s montage, and his control of perspective, resembles a critique of the dialectic of history as evinced by a teleology that elides Otherness and creates an underclass in the process.

highlight the subordinate nature of content or presence to irony. In doing this, the billboard, despite how one might read it, or what one might take it to mean, serves as a reminder of the *work* of art: it is intended¹⁴⁷ to operate as, or represent, a sort of irony at work in the text's mourning. Superficially, this is apparent in the fact that people gather around the blank billboard to see the apparition of Esmeralda's face and mourn her through the appearance of an allegorical representation. But less superficially, the sign is intended by Ismael as a site for the mourning of meaning or representation – what I have called the *work* of art depicted here as the absence or lack (the apparitional nature of the image of Esmeralda), that, as an irony, dramatises the process of allegory-making, of interpretation, as well as the afterlife of art. The billboard thus exists somewhere between faith (“unstoppered belief” (821)) and commodity (advertising) – indeed, the poles explored by *Underworld* more generally, and between which DeLillo explores the possibility of art.

The billboard is Ismael's *Unterwelt*, an act of irony ‘about’ irony, a representation without representation: the billboard is intended as a sign of a sign, it is about what in Sister Edgar's words is referred to as “words [signs] playing upon themselves”. What qualifies Ismael's “Esmeralda” as an artwork doubles as DeLillo's definition of art: art as irony, resistance, Otherness (artworks ‘about’ the *work* of art), *work* that not only “vandalize[s our] eyeballs” (435), making us see the previously unseen, but in reflecting on the “mutilations” of our allegories, makes us view language and subjectivity as tender, as a process of tendering. Which is to say that the billboard serves for DeLillo as a metonym for the novel. Ismael's “Esmeralda”, ephemeral and impermanent, is designed as a critique of the consumer culture that by falsely mourning Esmeralda's death gives death to her once again. As a figure of Otherness – never apprehended until her death – Esmeralda loses both her life and Otherness at the point where she is incorporated into the allegorical-symbolic. Her death is inseparable from the connection-making of the Internet (see *U*, 817-818), and the news of her murder on television; her death, as Ismael perhaps sees it, coincides with her becoming a sign or commodity, and as such, this informs his use of the billboard (a sign for commodities) as his canvas. Through this act of ironic-representation, Ismael gives Esmeralda an “afterlife” by demonstrating a faithfulness to allegory and the

¹⁴⁷ As all writers are aware, a blank space such as this billboard, occurring in a novel, much less a novel about representation, is never merely a naturalistic or mimetic detail, and, in this case, it is to be seen as a signifier of signifying, a writer's irony.

sign, showing how it is always a sign of something missed or lost and thus tender. With the arrival of vendors (commodity) and TV trucks (mediation and connection) at the billboard site, Esmeralda's apparition disappears (823-824).

Part Five: Tenderness and the Impossibility of Irony.

(i) Undiminishable Loss

If, through Klara's narrative, *Underworld* can be seen to observe the form of the *kunstlerroman*, with Nick's narrative, the text can be seen to develop in the manner of the *bildung*; its crowning moment is seen in the conjoining of Nick's 'education' (or maturation) with the text's final elaborations on irony. Indeed, it is my suggestion that DeLillo's inquiry into irony, Otherness, and what I have referred to as mourning, reaches a state of denouement when Nick, at the end of the text, comes to terms with the undiminishable nature of loss and Otherness. Such an understanding, for Nick, signals a philosophical turn, away from the astonishing technologies of connection and translation (the reification of allegory in the commodity symbolic), to a *phrōnesis* premised on the quintessential knowledge of irony: its impossibility articulated by the simultaneous and reciprocal demands, within irony, of its ironic and allegorical imperatives. For Nick it is by his meditations on certain objects (as well as on the object condition of language) that his melancholy and mournful philosophy is won. For DeLillo, what such a philosophy – built on the sense of tender, human finitude – represents is nothing less than the posing of faith and ethics as questions (as the *work*) to qualify, define, and make distinct, the tender or less tender reproductions and representations we make in "address[ing] the world" (538).

As we shall see, a 'theory' of irony as impossible, of Otherness (and loss) as undiminishable, is what, for DeLillo, rescues allegory from its commodity version. In the manner of Benjamin, allegories are to be seen, as Nick does at the end of the novel, as "ruins", tender and mortified traces of irony and Otherness. For Nick, as for all those characters in *Underworld* whose lives (their desires, needs, and losses) have been translated into the commodity-symbolic, and for whom the language of connection, consumption, and recycling has become a flawless language of presence and completion, the idea that loss, Otherness or excess cannot be fully translated or allegorised represents a radical rejection of the prevailing symbolic system.¹⁴⁸ Such

¹⁴⁸ Such a rejection and relinquishing of the dominant mode of allegorical control I have been documenting is prefaced in the text by Nick's confession of his private history to his wife Marian:

I tell her about the time I spent in correction and why they put me there and she seems to know it, at some level, already. She looks at me as if I were seventeen. She sees me at seventeen. We

an awareness comes to Nick when he once again considers the disappearance of his father.

The earth opened up and he stepped inside. [...] I think he wanted to go under. He lived day-to-day and step-to-step and did not wonder what would become of us or how she would manage or how tall we grew or how smart we became. I don't think he spent a minute thinking these things. I think he just went under. The failure it brought down on us does not diminish. (808)

Absent here are the allegories or narratives of violence (a “mob hit”) and coercion that have, up to this point, “carried” Nick’s mourning of his father; what remains is a candid statement about a person (the father) who had little regard for the Other – his ‘beloved’ others. And though one might suggest that it is the father’s failure of tenderness and imagination that leads to this “loss”, the ‘fact’ of the undiminishable nature of “failure” (loss and Otherness) is crucial to the conception of tenderness and irony that marks Nick’s maturation and, through the text, DeLillo’s philosophy of language, art, and writing.

The undiminishable nature of loss correlates, then, as a certain understanding of Otherness and suggests the impossibility of irony, that is, the impossibility of irony ever finding semiotic settlement sufficient to its resistance to settlement. This resistance is what we can think of as irony’s faithfulness to Otherness. And yet there is no irony without the trace of a settlement, without allegory. This mourning quality is for Nick, a sort of definition of the experience of being-in-language. As he says, “[m]ost of our longings go unfulfilled. This is the word’s wistful implication – a desire for something lost or fled or otherwise out of reach” (803). This is perhaps DeLillo’s clearest formulation yet of irony’s role in the economy of language, in the word, and the connection of irony to experiences of subjectivity and mourning as evinced throughout *Underworld*. At once, then, this is a description of irony as our experience of the word that, at the same time, also suggests that the impossible nature of irony is a consequence of its nature as “longing” or mourning. Indeed, the point is

take long walks along the drainage canal. All the hints and intimations, all the things she spied in me at the beginning of our time together – come to some completion now. If not for me, then for her. Because I don’t know what happened, do I? (807)

Here Nick allows the material of his “secret” self to “seep” out, beyond the containment and control characterised by his “life” metaphors of correction, waste management, and allegory. He allows himself to be allegorised by another – that sense of his being brought to some state of “completion” for another – knowing that because he cannot “know what happened” neither can she. In a sense, Nick is consenting to the tenderness of allegory, to the construction of a tender allegorical version of himself. This is the most significant confession Nick makes in *Underworld*. The final rhetorical question serves to make tender (ironize) all the allegories, names, memorizations that, up to this point, he has used to try to contain, and correct irony (and Otherness) with.

that something like the condition of mourning is also a condition we can think of as true to the word, and this is the suggestion made by DeLillo with his ambiguation of the sentence-subject in the above quote. Is it the “word” or the word “longing” Nick is referring to here? The resulting effect of this punning play (something DeLillo does often) is the splicing together of the (experience of) *word* with the experience of “longing” – irony, as mourning, is thus the truth of being-in-the-world, and the premise of DeLillo’s philosophy of language. As DeLillo appears to suggest, if, by the word (allegory), we are able to glimpse also the longing of the word (irony) – the richness entailed in its undiminishable incompleteness – then we have glimpsed the tenderness of allegory. In the simplest sense, perhaps, this is the contract DeLillo tenders with language whenever he writes; through the ironies of his allegories, that which DeLillo most esteems in his texts – memory, Otherness – is articulated, though only through the most tender, and tenderly renovated language. With this tenderness comes the sense of finitude and limit, the “fallen wonder” of subjectivity. As I will show, Nick learns to recognise the melancholy condition of the fallen subject in the object – the few rare objects of his possession that for him come to represent the process of tender recollection at work in allegory, an experience of tenderness that is, as allegory for our being ‘allegorical beings’, allegorical of our being-subject to memory and Otherness. Such objects, as I shall to come to insist, represent the true nature of allegory by revealing the absence or loss posited at their core in the same way Derrida has shown us death, absence, or loss, comported in the sign. Though its purpose is to flesh out my theory of melancholy tenderness availed by irony as a mode of mourning, this section also aims to address the notion of connection and the meaning of that ambiguous word, “peace” the novel finishes with, upon which many readers and commentators have mistakenly, I suggest, conferred the redemptive qualities of the novel.

(ii) Everything Connects

As a statement about the irony at work in language, and as an aphorism relating DeLillo’s own philosophy of language and representation, Nick’s phrase about the “word” brings to the fore, once again, the conflict central to *Underworld* and my reading of it: the conflict between Otherness and the massive forces of incorporation (the technologies of commodity) that serve to control and name such Otherness. This

conflict, as I have seen it, sets out the concerns at work in mourning. For the distinction I have made between irony and tender-less allegory in the realm of rhetoric, DeLillo offers us the distinction between the word's longing – its ironic structure – and the functioning of the commodity-symbolic (allegory reified as commodity). Nowhere in the text is DeLillo so clear about this function of this symbolic economy as at the beginning of the novel's final section, *Das Kapital*:

Capital burns off the nuance in a culture. Foreign investment, global markets, corporate acquisitions, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuating influence of money that's electronic and sex that's cyberspaced, untouched money and computer-safe sex, the convergence of consumer desire – not that people want the same things, necessarily, but that they want the same range of choices. [...]

Some things fade and wane, states disintegrate, assembly lines shorten their runs and interact with lines in other countries. This is what desire seems to demand. A method of production that will custom-cater to cultural and personal needs, not to cold war ideologies of massive uniformity. And the system pretends to go along, to become more supple and resourceful, less dependent on rigid categories. But even as desire tends to specialize, going silky and intimate, the force of converging markets produces an instantaneous capital that shoots across horizons at the speed of light, making for a certain furtive sameness, a planning away of particulars that affects everything from architecture to leisure time to the way people eat and sleep and dream. (785)

What should be apparent, by this account, is how the circuit of commodity production operates as a symbolic system, as a language. Indeed, the commodity-symbolic, through its mimicry of language, appears to usurp the economy of language: subordinating the sign to the commodity, reducing deferral and difference to the “same range of choices”, translating combination as the “interaction” of product “lines in other countries”, while the principles of deletion and substitution are confined to the “fad[ing]” and “wan[ing]” of certain products. As I have been suggesting throughout this chapter, the system even simulates irony or Otherness, in the first instance, through the way it “pretends” to reject “massive uniformity” and “rigid categories” by becoming “supple”, “going silky and intimate”, but in another, deeper way, through its sheer force of connection. With the connection of the system's structure and function to the “personal needs” of the individual, the subject (local and specific) is connected to the global (as Matt has suggested with his intimations on paranoia); the result is the astonishment of a created sublime, unimaginable to the individual, that simulates Otherness, in a sense (as DeLillo has said) replacing God. The effect of such a connecting system, capable of generating its own sublime referent, is that there is no longer the possibility of loss, Otherness, or death within the system – only the “death of death”. For this reason, we find Sister Edgar, after her death, trapped in cyberspace purgatory (825).

With what is described as the burning off of “nuance”, not only difference is lost, but Otherness and unknowing are also diminished. DeLillo suggests this with his word choice: “nuance” derives from the Latin “*nubes*”, or cloud, which, in turn, recalls *The Cloud of Unknowing*, that lesson about irony, Otherness and God. Of course, the other cloud “nuance” is designed to remember is the mushroom cloud, and in this regard we are meant to contrast the references with one another. What such a connection suggests is that it is a mistake to read these references as connecting unproblematically, or without irony and, indeed, in a passage (785) that so heavily foregrounds connection, it is connection-making itself that is ironized by this submerged reference (“nuance”) to Otherness. Beneath the surface of interacting lines and instantaneous, unseen reticulations, exists an underworld of irony and Otherness by which we are given cause to consider such connections for what they mourn or miss, and to consider the ethics and faith of their configuration. Without such tendering of connections we are left with the sort of worldview Matt articulates when he concludes that “everything connects in the end, or *seems* to, or seems to only because it does” (465).¹⁴⁹ Such is the state of utility and connectivity that connection, as an effect of the system, appears to subordinate the imagining of things to the condition of the connections among things. All the possible tenderness evoked by a word such as “seems” – with its suggestion of imprecision, and ambiguity, the uncertainty that invites imagining – is dismissed and replaced with the concrete “because it does”. The place of irony in what one might have seen as the “seem[ing]” world thus becomes untenable – as does belief when, in Matt’s words, one can no longer “tell the difference between syringes and missiles if you’ve become so pliant, ready to half believe everything and to fix conviction in nothing” (466).

In a sense, the portrayal of the connecting system of capitalism, as previously quoted, is to be read also as a description of the Internet. The “instantaneous capital that shoots across horizons at the speed of light” is meant to recall not only the temporality of Bruegel’s dead – that force of allegory that falls upon the living – but also the flash of nuclear detonation; from this constellation of references (allegory, technology, and the “speed of light”) we are meant to see the Internet as the combining, culminating form of capitalism. The Internet can be seen as the manifestation of the culture’s dominant mode of mourning, premised on the sublime

¹⁴⁹ We note here, also, a certain consistency in DeLillo’s attention to this word “seems” as it occurs in *The Body Artist*, and that suggests the continuity of DeLillo’s engagement with allegoricity.

of the connection-fetish seen as the *work* of capitalism. Not surprisingly, DeLillo's critique of connection (tender-less allegory, commodity capitalism and its sanctioned acts of blindness and violence) finds its most focused expression in his treatment of the Internet, particularly where the rape and murder of Esmeralda is spliced together in the text with the keystrokes and search commands of an Internet user. In a sense, Esmeralda's rape is a possibility explained by the logic of the Internet. Sister Edgar, floating in her cyberspace purgatory, feels something of the force of this logic:

There is no space or time out here, or in here, or wherever she is. There are only connections. Everything is connected. [...] [S]he feels the grip of systems. This is why she's so uneasy. [...] She senses the paranoia of the web, the net. (825)

The possibilities of making meaning, of connecting – without space or time, without difference or Otherness – thus correlate to the meaningless sexual connection of the rape. In the way the text combines the Internet search-prompt with the description of the rape there is the sense that the rape is made available to anyone with an Internet connection, and if this implies that everyone is, in some way, complicit with the murder, it also suggests that no one is responsible for it; this is, after all, the appeal of the Internet, of being “unseen” (808) and “everywhere at once” (808), and the logic of the “lurker” (808) (a non-posting internet user) who, like the “sidler type” (817) the murderer is described as, “doesn't like to be looked at” (817). In so far as the rape is a possibility of the net (a violent connection between two people – reduced to signs – brought arbitrarily together), then it is a possibility that needs to be placed in the context of the other connections endorsed in the commodity-symbolic that may well also elide a glaring lack of connection.

Elision itself, however, much less the subjects or objects elided, becomes invisible in a system such as that described as the “fusion bomb” (826) of capitalism's symbolic economy. Within such an economy,

Everything is connected in the end.

Sister and Brother. A Fantasy in cyberspace and a way of seeing the other side and a settling of differences that have less to do with gender than with difference itself, all argument, all conflict programmed out.

Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around? Which contains the other, and how can you tell for sure? (826)

Thus, irony and Otherness (here “difference”) are “programmed out”; the whole system proceeds on the controlling of difference and irony through fusion and connection. Where there is no perceived difference or resistance between “input” and “output”, and thus, between “Sister and Brother”, what results is a kind of “fantasy”

of illicit and incestuous connection. Within this boundary-less state there is, seemingly, no possibility for an underworld, an Other-world, indeed, no way of telling the difference between world and its allegorical simulation, cyberspace. For DeLillo the way to reassert difference in the economy is by stepping back from the miraculous and seamless allegory evidenced by the Internet, and re-asserting a theory *of* allegory. If “everything connects”, then allegory is no longer possible, since there is no longer the possibility of ascertaining the difference that marks one thing as a representation of another (this is the problem posed by the question in the quotation). Cyberspace, as allegorical technology replaces the world, asserts this border-less state, because by diminishing and controlling irony, it renders allegory untenable.

Thus, to answer to the culture’s diminishment and false mourning of Otherness is to return to the evaluation of language and allegory, the structure and trope the commodity-symbolic has simulated and misrecognised. DeLillo’s gaze thus returns from his larger systemic questions to the question of a single word, a single instance of language and allegory: “Peace”. In returning to the consideration of the word, he is able to propose again the truth of all allegory, sign and commodity – that they are mortified objects, composed by irony as traces for an Otherness they can only mourn through the nature of their finitude, contingency and fallen tenderness. DeLillo’s critique of the false mourning of the commodity-symbolic thus, in the concluding pages of *Underworld*, moves from all the connections that cyberspace can link to this “single seraphic word” (“peace”), to the consideration of the world “offscreen” – the “binding touch” of objects, the “argument of things” and their “thick lived tenor” (827). For DeLillo such phrases act as a metaphor for tenderness (an abstraction) by their appeal to the material world. Indeed, that sense of phenomena and the phenomenal so apparent in the following passage, is metaphor for the mortification of language (its relationship to death), the fallen and object conditions of allegory in light of the Other.

[Y]ou look at the things in the room, offscreen, unwebbed, the tissue grain of the deskwood alive in light, the thick lived tenor of things, the argument of things to be seen and eaten, the apple core going sepia in the lunch tray, and the dense measures of experience in a random glance. The monk’s candle reflected in the slope of the phone, hours marked in Roman numerals, and the glaze of the wax, and the curl of the braided wick, and the chipped rim of the mug that holds your yellow pencils, skewed all crazy, and the plied lives of the simplest surface, the slabbed butter melting on the crumbled bun, and the yellow of the yellow pencils, and you try to imagine the word on the screen becoming a thing in the world, taking all its meanings, its sense of serenities and contentments out into the streets somehow, its whisper of reconciliation, a word extending itself ever outward, the tone of agreement or treaty, the tone of repose, the sense of mollifying silence, the tone of hail and farewell, a word that carries the sunlit ardour of an object deep in drenching noon, the argument of binding touch, but it’s only a sequence of

pulses on a dullish screen and all it can do is make you pensive – a word that spreads a longing through the raw sprawl of the city and out across the dreaming bourns and orchards to the solitary hills.

Peace. (827)

A writer appears here, in this last passage of the novel, and taking in their surroundings, appears to address the limits of their language: account for these “things”, the author of the passage appears to ask, work them into some system of connections that can settle the nature of their nuances, their distinct thing-ness, their materiality; account for the “plied lives of the simplest surfaces” the writer seems to ask of themselves (and the reader, “you”) in taking language to the limits of description, revealing its object-like state when its effect is to reflect on itself, on its own reflecting: “the yellow of the yellow of the pencils”. But, of course, language does account for these “things”, but only in so far as it is used by an “author” who recognises the irony involved in the *work* of accounting for things, the *work* involved in allegory. Which is to say, language *is* adequate to reality when it is perceived as a delay or deferral of that reality, and when, because of this mourning-quality, language itself (its signs, allegories) lives on in an “afterlife” of iteration. For this reason, it is not the content (the things named in) this passage avails that DeLillo celebrates, but what it signifies about language’s relationship to loss and irony, illustrated here through the very materiality of language – its tender finitude through which Otherness remains always yet to be tendered. The very persistence with which the writer of this passage attempts to render the things seen before them operates as an index to the fact that these objects still escape their allegorisation or representation.

Thus, the word and the object are brought together, and we see this in the phrase that describes the word that appears on the screen: “a word that carries the sunlit ardour of an object”. The *word* (not merely “a word”) for DeLillo “carries” the world like an object carries an “argument of binding touch”. Thus associated, we begin to glimpse what perhaps allegory might faithfully aspire to: the condition of the “ruin”, a thing marked like Nick’s collected objects, by its thingness, its tenderness as materiality, by limitation, a death composed within itself, and, so, tender as the “tone of hail and farewell” – a word that is not merely the placeholder for a connection, but rather tender for a difference it can only contingently “carry”: like a “whisper of reconciliation”, like “a word extending itself ever outward”, through deferral and difference, and like a tendering, a “tone of agreement of treaty”. In drawing our attention to the things listed in this passage, DeLillo draws our attention to both their

thing-ness and to their word-ness, their nature as mortified signs. DeLillo uses objects to highlight the object nature of language as something to celebrate (a way of recognising the *work* of irony, the importance of loss), illustrating as he does so what the Internet and the commodity-symbolic cannot connect or translate. The very limitation of the word, its composition in loss and irony, is what we have to acknowledge about the word, and as Ira Nadel has written (about “peace”), we have to “admit its weakness and that its meaning might be lost.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the tenderness (or “weakness”) of the word (both the *word*, and the word “peace”) is what DeLillo insists on, and is why he clouds the apparition of this word “peace” with an irony. The word is, thus, only a “piece”, only a fragment or ruin.¹⁵¹ So it is then that “peace” is a “word that spreads a longing”; it is a word like all words (and their “wistful implication”), that expresses a loss, a mourning through the nature of its being incomplete – exactly, a piece or fragment – which means it remains a sign for signs (hence the pun on “peace” – language referring to itself), suggesting the ruin as the truth of allegory.

Because the world or Other always escapes the word, this means that the world or Other is always still to be tendered. The act of naming is how we tender this Otherness, but because this Other is, perversely, always Other, then the “thing named escapes” the name.¹⁵² What this means is that language, while being the necessary tool with which we tender the Other, is, itself, a vulnerable, limited, contingent and fallen tool – it is, to use my language, itself tender, a form of tenderness. Words, names, signs are thus always in a state of mourning; words mourn the world by trying to retain a piece of it, even though such a piece is only the trace of the world’s disappearance from it. With this recognition (something DeLillo awards to his artists and ironists) of the loss that constitutes the word, the word bares us to a relationship with death. There is a tenderness here that DeLillo celebrates in language (as a modelling of the demands of art, and a qualifying of what art might be in the postmodern), but this is a tenderness, as the word (“tenderness”) suggests, vulnerable to misprision and abuse. For DeLillo, what appears to make language (the word) “seraphic” is its exposure to the ironies constitutive of mourning, its “fallen” quality that, after Benjamin, I have been referring to as mortification. For language, this

¹⁵⁰ See Nadel in *Underwords*. 2002. p.197.

¹⁵¹ This is an idea suggested in the text with its fragment: “fasten, fit closely, bind together” (827), that reads as part of a possible definition of the word “piece”.

¹⁵² See David Cowart. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. 2003. p.2.

means seeing its allegories as beautiful ruins, and for DeLillo, this is explored in *Underworld* through Nick's and Matt's meditations on objects.

(iii) The Tenderness of Mourning: Between the Straight-up and the Slanted

In effect we find a metaphor for mortified allegory, for allegory as ruin, in the bunker Matt and Janet spend a night in while in the desert. Moreover, as a metaphor for allegory, the bunker can be seen to express also the tender condition of being-in-language.

There was something irresistible about the building, of course, even an unyielding ruin such as this, slabbed private and tight. It stood alone here, with the mountains behind it, and carried the tilted lyric of a misplaced object, like some prairie drive-in shut down for years with the audio hookups all askew and the huge screen facing blankly toward a cornfield. It's the kind of human junk that deepens the landscape, makes it sadder and lonelier and places a vague sad subjective regret at the edge of your response – not regret so much as a sense of time's own esthetic, how strange and still and beautiful a chunk of concrete can be, lived in fleetingly and abandoned, the soul of wilderness signed by men and women passing through. (459)

The possibility that this insensate slab of concrete might be so expressive of allegory and the tender experience of subjectivity is, in part, explained by its situation: the bunker, as an object of “human junk”, a ruin, is surrounded by Otherness (the desert, in DeLillo's texts, always serves to represent this) and is exposed to the temporal evocation of Otherness – “time's own esthetic”. As well as this, however, we are inclined to consider the tenderness of the bunker as a feature of its distance and removal from the commodity-symbolic (hence, “unyielding”). In a sense, the bunker expresses something of the aura of allegory because of its “misplaced” relation to its former utility. Once an observation post for the testing of weapons (commodities), the bunker serves now, in the wider context of the desert, to offer observation on itself as a man-made object or sign, a contingent allegory (signed by people “passing through”), “lived in fleetingly and abandoned”, a sign reversed on itself in a sense, mourning the nature of signs and allegories rather than observing the weapons and technologies allegory may produce. At once the bunker expresses the “irresistible” quality of allegory – we must “address the world” (538) – but also the mournful nature of allegory that can be seen as the “vague sad subjective regret” that exists at the edge of our responses to the world, the Other. If such a mourning presents something of the truth of our being-in-language, as I've been suggesting, then we may see now how all our allegories are “misplaced objects”, and how subjectivity

resembles a “tilted lyric”. Indeed, as Matt’s phrase appears to suggest, subjectivity (a lyric) with all its “strange[ness]” and “beaut[y]” is made possible by this misplacing, and after all, isn’t this also what Nick refers to as the “wistful implication” of the word?

It is such a sense of loss or being missed that explains Matt’s resort to simile; the bunker is “like” another “misplaced object”: an abandoned “drive-in”. Ostensibly a detail of the demand for iteration Otherness places on language, the drive-in, as simile, expresses something of the allegorical condition of subjectivity where, in light of an excess and Otherness we cannot recover, we “sign”, instead, one misplaced allegory after another. The drive-in is perhaps a better allegory *for* allegory (as ruin) than the bunker since it more effectively appears to suggest the auratic quality of the ruin. The movie screen, ostensibly a sign (of a sign) in the “wilderness” reflects back the “wilderness” (Otherness) in the sign: once looked at (as a placeholder for an allegory – the function of all signs), the screen, now imageless (or mortified), looks back, at ‘us’, and at our own looking. It is Otherness that looks back through the abandoned allegory (or object), and it is this sense that seems to mark for DeLillo the object-allegory, or unyielding commodity, as auratic. So there is a kind of reversal at work here in DeLillo’s (Matt’s) allegory of the drive-in film screen: the “huge screen” looks back, rather than shows, the “audio hookups” listen rather than convey, and what it is that is heard and seen is the impossible irony (the unseen, unheard) that tenders Otherness. The ruin, as we shall see with Nick’s handling of his objects, contains a mortality that coincides with a certain reversibility of its function (evident also in the commodity when emptied of exchange value), and thus becomes a sort of material irony that, as I have been suggesting, reflects not only the tenderness of our allegories, but also our own tenderness to an Otherness we can only mourn through irony.

For Nick, this sense of mortality – cathected in his rare objects – is what redefines his “philosophy” of subjectivity, as articulated by his consideration of language and its relationship to loss, Otherness and irony. Through Nick’s meditations, DeLillo elaborates the quality of ethical mourning (irony) that in *Underworld* represents the tenderness of being, as expressed by the impossible *work* of art. A precondition of this *work* is, however, the mortality of its object. Thus,

[...] I walk through the house and look at the things we own and feel the odd mortality that clings to every object. The finer and rarer the object, the more lonely it makes me feel, and I don’t know how to account for this. (804)

The rarity of the object is a consequence of its distance from the commodity-symbolic. By evoking this unaccountable mortality the object becomes an object of mourning, its very distance from “the drudgery of being useful”¹⁵³ is key in its capacity to signify the mourning quality of all objects, signs, and allegories. Such objects serve to reflect, for a character like Nick, their being-object, that is, on the condition of allegory as ruin, as composed by a mortality that, in economic or systemic terms, resembles an underworld that capitalism represses through its false mourning of connection and paranoia, and through its simulation of Otherness, irony and dissent.

Significantly, Nick’s meditations on objects, as with his past meditations on language, usually so wrapped-up in narcissistic mourning, here tender the presence of another, his wife Marian. Marian’s Otherness to Nick, something evoked by the mortality of his objects, and his new understanding of the limits of allegory and thus, subjectivity, comes to express the tender and sombre place of being in the world, and of living within the truth of death and loss.

The intimacies we’ve come to share, the belated exchange of childhoods and other ferocious times, and something else, a firm grip of another kind, a different direction, not back but forward – the grasp of objects that bind us to some betokening. I think I sense Marian missing in the objects on the walls and shelves. There is something somber about the things we’ve collected and own, the household effects, there is something about the word itself, *effects*, the lacquered chest in the alcove, that breathes a kind of sadness – the wall hangings and artefacts and valuables – and I feel a loneliness, a loss, all the greater and stranger when the object is relatively rare and it’s the hour after sunset in a stillness that feels unceasing. (808)

The tenderness of subjectivity – its finitude – finds expression for Nick in the ‘mortality’ of his objects, and does so because they convey the tenderness of allegory. Against the attempt to control Otherness, repress, contain and simulate it through technologies of allegory, through the repetitions, recycling and connection making of the commodity-symbolic, Nick comes to recognise and integrate Otherness, death, loss and irony into his life, just as these are integrated in the possibility of the sign, object, or commodity, as the truth of the possibility of the sign or word. By such an integration a sense of his own Otherness, as well as the Otherness of others, notably, his wife’s, is reconceived.

For Nick, however, the chief object or ruin in which the possibility of allegory made tender by irony is expressed is the baseball. Condensed into its memory-saturated hide and prousted core, into the very phenomenality of its veneer of

¹⁵³ See Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. 1999. [H3a,1].

“generational sweat”, and the stains of the “lives behind it” (131), the ball constellates all that DeLillo assumes about the nature of rhetoric (allegory and irony), textuality (reading, writing, representing), language (the economy of signs, the system) and their relation to Otherness and memory.

This is how I came across the baseball, rearranging books on the shelves. I look at it and squeeze it hard and put it back on the shelf, wedged between a slanted book and a straight-up book, an expensive and beautiful object that I keep half hidden, maybe because I tend to forget why I bought it. Sometimes I know exactly why I bought it and other times I don't, a beautiful thing smudged green near the Spalding trademark and bronzed with nearly half a century of earth and sweat and chemical change, and I put it back and forget it until next time. (809)

One hears echoes of Emily Dickinson's “Tell the Truth but tell it Slant”¹⁵⁴ here, but also an echo within *Underworld* itself to the earlier reference (of Matt's) to the “tilted lyric” of a “misplaced object”. As previously discussed, such objects (bunker, ball) are to be seen as allegories and here, once again, as with the association of lyric and subjectivity, we find a slant (or tilted) truth depicted as some truth of being subject, a truth all the more tender for the suggestion of its slip or fall from the “straight-up”. Truth, we might say, is a slant affair, in Dickinson's terms, the gradual “dazzle” of truth is the tale of allegory, while irony (or Otherness, what irony refers to) is the “superb surprise”. The truth of truth is that allegories go astray in the service of description, and that this is the force of irony in allegory that, as we see, DeLillo comes to celebrate in *Underworld*.

The ball, kept between the “slanted” and the “straight-up” (and not just kept between the two, but composed of the two) is thus an object for all I have designated by my term tenderness, something tender and tendered between the ironic truth and the allegorical truth, in the dilemma of mourning, the condition, it seems, for what DeLillo calls a “beautiful thing”, placed between forgetting and remembering (“sometimes I know exactly [...] other times I don't”). The ball then stands in for the “mystery of loss” – not merely personal loss, but the vital loss invested in allegory (as irony's force), and it is this being at a loss for allegory – between knowing and not knowing – that makes the ball beautiful, an object by which to reflect on the tenderness of being subjects in language and in the world, just as this ball as tender witness of its own loss demonstrates a faithfulness to allegory as ruin, as a sign for something Other and in excess of itself – a *phrōnesis* which for DeLillo is the opening and defining question posed by any art that proposes to treat ethically and faithfully

¹⁵⁴ Kathleen Fitzpatrick has noted the possible Dickinson reference also. See her article “The Unmaking of History: Baseball, Cold War, and *Underworld*” in *Underwords* 2002. pp.144-160.

the experience of subjectivity and its overwhelming debt to Otherness and memory. All of which, we might consider, is smuggled in that phrase of DeLillo's, "the fallen wonder of the world", that serves as the absent epigraph to all of his writings. The fallen allegory or name, represented by Nick in his objects that tell a tilted truth, as well as those *punctum* and *parergon* moments in the text associated with the *work* of art, is nothing less than the possibility of irony.

Chapter Four: *Cosmopolis*

Part One: Pain

(i) Introduction

If, on the subjects of art and the ethical regard for Otherness, both *Underworld* and *The Body Artist* appear to conclude on notes of wary, if melancholy, optimism, DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* issues a note of pessimism, all the more evocative for the reason that its protagonist wilfully rejects the necessary conditions of what I have been referring to as tenderness: Otherness and irony. Eric Packer is, as the text reveals, no less capable than Klara, Nick, or Lauren of perceiving tenderness, but where these characters permit an articulation of Otherness that effectively re-tenders their philosophies of representation and their regard for others, Packer chooses instead the "old bio-chemistry of the ego, the saturated self" (208). What we find in *Cosmopolis* is that it is irony, cast here as the pain of the postmodernism of late capitalism, that the capitalist system and the commodity-symbolic, as embodied in Packer, forcefully argues against. Part of the pessimism apparent in DeLillo's text, indeed, a consequence of his conflation of violence, tender-less allegory, and technology, is that the *work* of mourning – so deeply linked by DeLillo to the possibility of difference and the ethical imagining of Otherness – can, as we see in *Cosmopolis*, so easily be made unnecessary to the workings of late capitalism. The apparent ease with which Otherness and the *work* of mourning (irony) can be misrecognised, settled, simulated and/or repressed, represents for DeLillo, I suggest, the implausible nature of the ethical in the sphere of twenty-first century American futurism. In essence, as I shall show, it is this futurism, in fact, a misrecognised mode of mourning designed to control and diminish Otherness, that Packer represents. As we shall see, the *work* of irony and mourning – the very demand of pain, memory and Otherness – is not, in good faith, attended to, despite the overwhelming evidence of loss recorded in *Cosmopolis* through depictions of the street, the body, the anachronism or ruin, that exist as the repressed underworld condition of capitalism. Capitalism, as is made clear in *Cosmopolis*, is to be understood as a response to the pain and Otherness of the world through its reification of false mourning and by making invisible and natural its modes of representation.

In *Cosmopolis* it is through pain that the experience of Otherness (be it affirming or destructive) is registered. Primarily this notion of pain is an abstraction; certainly it is felt, the term contains the obvious somatic context, but in DeLillo's text it also signifies the incomplete project of reification within capitalism, the disguised aesthetic deficits of the commodity-symbolic, the rifts in its epistemological and ontological allegories where Otherness, irony, and memory lurk in their recalcitrance. Pain, we might say, is the 'truth' of an excess or remainder that can never be totally settled or completely aestheticised by any culture's modes of representation and reproduction. In *Cosmopolis*, pain manifests as the Otherness that haunts the postmodern and in particular, a late capitalism premised on the misrecognition of such Otherness. As I have said in my introduction (and as has been my theme in reading DeLillo's novels along the borderline of irony and allegory), the making-absent of irony from allegory, the wilful, systemic and motivated misprision of irony in allegory (Otherness in representation, difference in modes of production), is precisely a procedure DeLillo identifies as capitalist. It has been my suggestion that DeLillo, with his texts that survey so broadly the field of cultural production from commodity to art, seeks to expose the tendency of capitalist modes of representation towards the status of invisibility, the natural, the inevitable. To perform this sort of critique is not to make the mistake of assuming irony in allegory, but to set out to ethically re-assert irony, Otherness, and its synonym, memory, in representation and cultural production; which is what DeLillo does in writing the novels I have discussed that, as I read them, propose a certain tender 'theory' of art and writing that is also a tendering of irony.

As I shall show, the issue of Otherness and irony in the text coincides with experiences and expressions of pain, often inscribed in sites of tenderness: scars on flesh, the ruined nature of objects, the anachronistic qualities of words, traditions and objects, all of which, as markers of pain and Otherness, serve also to represent the fallen-ness of subjectivity, of language and being in time. In so far as irony is key to recognising Otherness, irony is crucial to the apprehension of pain, not as something to repress or destroy, but as a tenderness. But such a tenderness, understood as both the split between and the relationship of experience and representation, is missed by the primary figures of *Cosmopolis*; the tender relationship of irony and allegory is seen rather as a definitive wound to which Packer, for example, responds by searching for an exalted state, the perfect allegory with which to bridge the rift, an "aesthetics of interaction", sacred and ritualised, "a common surface, an affinity between market

movements and the natural world” (86).¹⁵⁵ The search for such a surface, such an intersection of realms, defines Packer’s mourning and his relation to the pain and Otherness of being; it defines his wish to transcend the material world of anachronism, bodies, the street, and memory through assumption into a state of pure ‘fleshless-ness’, an immortality forever ahead of the pain of delay and deferral. Essentially, Packer’s transcendentalism is revealed to be the triumph of a capitalism seen, by DeLillo, as a culture’s response to the pain of being, whereby, through its fusing of technology, allegory and commodity, such pain (such Otherness), and with it, irony itself, can be avoided. As I shall show, like *Underworld*, in which late twentieth century capitalism is shown as a development springing from the experience of loss, *Cosmopolis*’s Eric Packer too is revealed to be impelled by a profound loss, the loss of his father.¹⁵⁶

Benno Levin, the second narrator of *Cosmopolis*, is, like Packer, also determined by certain experiences of loss, and, in a way that has become paradigmatic of certain figures in DeLillo’s fiction, seeks to mourn this loss through a theory of allegory. Levin’s most succinct statement of his mourning is thus also a statement about his failure to tender irony and conceive of allegory as anything other than an impoverished mimeticism. As Levin says: “There are dead stars that still shine because their light is trapped in time. Where do I stand in this light, which does not strictly exist?” (155) In effect, Levin’s question, posed in a metaphor for language, is one that addresses the poststructural experience of language: the light from the star is like language itself, as provoked by a world, origin, or referent that, with the advent of poststructuralism, we now understand is lost, or absent, in fact, was never simply present – a “dead star”. The light exists, but its referent does not; the light is not the star, but rather a delayed trace of the star, an allegory. Thus, the “light” is metaphor for allegory and language, specifically, the tenderness and negative structure of language that, in the manner of irony, is composed by a loss, a death, as something

¹⁵⁵ This is precisely the sort of consideration DeLillo has characters in *Underworld* and *The Body Artist* consider also, but to entirely different ends: Lauren’s response to her question about the “intersection” of time, space and language, as with Nick’s eventual melancholic appreciation of the fallen beauty of language, serves to represent a tender and ethical faith in language and Otherness. In contrast to this, Packer’s response to the above consideration defines him as a venal, narcissistic capitalist.

¹⁵⁶ As we have seen with *Underworld*’s Nick Shay, the loss of a father is, to the son, equivalent to a crisis of authority and representation. Such characters as Shay and Packer respond to the ‘emergence’ of this absence – in fact, the radical and disruptive discovery of the principle of irony at the heart of language – by repressing irony (and with it, Otherness and memory) through the search for the pure (irony-disabling) allegory. We note, for example, how Packer ‘kills’ words and technologies before they have a chance to become ironic, self-referring, historical, or memoried.

other it can never make present. This light (allegory) is trapped in time, fallen we might say, but of course a theory of irony's relation to allegory would see this quality of delay in allegory as its vital and tender feature. Levin's pain consists in his failure of this appreciation.

In a sense, it is a theory of allegory, as previously rehearsed in *The Body Artist* and *Underworld*, considered as more or less tender, acknowledged by a culture or individuals to be more or less tendered by irony, and as mourned or misprised by symbolic economies, that can be seen to define the crucial issues of *Cosmopolis*: temporality and Otherness. In fact, what I will suggest is that temporality and Otherness are actually one issue within the commodity-symbolic DeLillo critiques, a consequence of the fusing of semiotic and commodity production with the experience of time.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, this is the constellation crucial to *Cosmopolis* where temporality, as a category of Otherness, is subject to what in my *Underworld* chapter I described as the faithless mourning of the commodity-symbolic. The explication of this rather dense paragraph shall comprise much of the work of this chapter that I shall shortly commence with, but for one final clarification on the subject and word DeLillo, with *Cosmopolis*, seems most clearly to foreground: "pain".

Pain, it seems, lies at the nexus of the split, within the postmodern, between narcissism and tenderness, between the self and the Other. Pain 'labels' a contradiction as well as an interdependency, and thus restates the irony of postmodern subjectivity and representation, namely that the self is experienced as such because of a necessary narcissism that is itself only generated by encounters with Otherness, just as Otherness can only be experienced through the categories of the self. Otherness can only be felt to be Other if it is felt as Other to the self. How do we account for this translation of Other to *same* when the medium of language – itself a system of differences – at the instant of our utterance is always a reduction of difference, excess, and Otherness to the self/same? The answer (*qua* Derrida and DeLillo) is to situate irony, tenderness and mourning at the root of language as something to recognise as the enabling condition of language and meaning, not to the purpose of some prosecution of a final and complete settlement, but as an aspect of faith, a form of *phrōnesis*. *Cosmopolis*, in its own ironic method, makes this clear in not attempting to

¹⁵⁷ In this regard *Cosmopolis* can be read as a fusing of *The Body Artist*'s investigation of time as Otherness and its representation in language, and *Underworld*'s anatomisation of the semiotic and symbolic structure of capitalist modes of reproduction.

make it clear, and by pursuing a narrative tethered to the consciousness of a magnate such as Packer, who misses such irony; who, despite his several opportunities, and his own intuitions, fails mourning in such a way as to make tenderness *Cosmopolis*'s negative state; in a sense, *Cosmopolis* represents DeLillo's most ethical and faithful treatment of irony and Otherness by presenting the "tenderness of tenderness" in a text that presents irony ironically.

All of what I have been saying about pain is located also within the subject, between consciousness and memory, between the self and the self-as-Other (as another), and it is no coincidence that *Cosmopolis*'s most adored and valorised subject, New York city, should also map so closely the relational aspects of fallen subjectivity. In a sense *Cosmopolis* is a love letter to New York, and, as it has been observed before, pain (difference, Otherness, the "broken ruins", and the fallen aspects of being-subject) is deeply engraved in DeLillo's love for the city. In effect, Wendy Steiner spells this out in her consideration of DeLillo's *White Noise*, a novel that

is built on a generic cacophony suggested in its title. The novel is an exercise in interference, exploring at every level from dialogue to genre to plot the static that obscures messages and foils attempts at closure. DeLillo associates this static, moreover, with pain, the unifying concern of postmodern fiction. In an interview with Thomas LeClair, he described the subway arcades beneath 14th Street in New York, where "you hear mostly Spanish and Black English with bits of Yiddish, German, Italian, and Chinese, and then there is this strange, broken language. The language of the insane is stronger than all the others. It is the language of self, the pain of self." Eliot's rubble heap of western culture here becomes the cacophony of the city and the broken ruins of the self, the individual – the partial, idiosyncratic one.¹⁵⁸

DeLillo's words here lend an image to what throughout this thesis I have sought to describe as memory, as storehouse of difference, as reliquary of ruins, and fallen signs, a wonderful, almost miraculous underworld of any given present or presence, albeit composed *via negativa*, which is to say, via the delayed and differing form of allegory, but evidenced in the physical, corporeal and fallen world of the material as well. We see here how a city can be a model for living memory, composed of tenderness(es), ironies, and qualities of mourning to set against the futurism of capitalism and its cohort, the violence and memoryless-ness of ritual commodification. In *Cosmopolis* we come to glimpse the tenderness of pain when it is set against the misrecognised and simulated pain of capitalism, seeing as we do that,

¹⁵⁸ See Wendy Steiner, "Postmodern Fictions: 1970 – 1990" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (ed. Sacvan Bercovitch). Vol. 7, 1999. p.497.

in fact, such a process of misrecognition (a systematic quality of its reifying and aestheticising tendencies) is definitive of the capitalism the artist must resist.

(ii) The Street

In *Cosmopolis*, two ‘categories’ stand out as *loci* of pain: the street and the body. As we will see, both categories are depicted as sites that, through their association, by DeLillo, with the ruin, the anachronism, memory, and materiality, contain the conditions of tenderness. As such, both the street and the body are depicted as sites of an Otherness that capitalism (as evinced through Packer) seeks to repress and misrecognise. Thus, the street is where one encounters the Other:

The place was crowded. He heard stray words in French and Somali seeping through the ambient noise. That was the disposition of the end of 47th Street. Dark women in ivory robes walking in the river wind toward the UN secretariat. Apartment towers called L’Ecole and Octavia. There were Irish nannies pushing strollers in the parks. And Elise of course, Swiss or something, sitting across the table. (17)

The point of such a passage is to pay attention to the details of Otherness that are inseparable from the composition of the Polis. We live in Otherness, in a Babel of humanity, languages, and the pain of “white noise”.

People hurried past, the others of the street, endless anonymous, twenty-one lives per second, race-walking in their faces and pigments, sprays of fleetest being. They were here to make the point that you did not have to look at them. (20)

The street is significant for DeLillo and his concern with Otherness for the way it marks a boundary to the ego’s settlement of Otherness. The material of the street, and its denizens, exists independently and in autonomy from the self. Indeed, the whole issue of “being” is swept up in the word “fleetest” – as something speeding by, and also wistful, transient. The street resists the tendency to ontologise, to place the self at the centre of the “intersection” of the world and its representation.

Not merely the location of Otherness, the street marks the critical association in DeLillo’s texts of memory and the ruined, “makeshift” quality of human signs and objects, *with* this Otherness.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the reader is meant to recognise the “persistence” of such signs and objects, such tenderness(es) as are composed and fated to fall into memory, past-time, obsolescence and anachronism. By this falling of meaning from intent, sign from referent, do we find ourselves in the avenues of irony,

¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the street is, in *Cosmopolis*, what the desert is in *Underworld* and so many of DeLillo’s other novels – a space of excess, memory, Otherness and time as it is before we allegorise it.

in fact, the avenues of Otherness and memory, where “things” *do* “persist” and iterate and require to be seen once again – even when it is Eric Packer doing the seeing, as here, noting in fact how the process of the fall into obsolescence goes “mostly unseen”:

Heavy trucks went downtown bouncing, headed to the garment district or the meatpacking docks, and nobody saw them. They saw the cockney selling children’s books from a cardboard box, making his pitch from his knees. Eric thought they were the same thing, these two, and the old Chinese was the same, doing acupoint massage, and the repair crew passing fiber-optic cable down a manhole from an enormous yellow spool. He thought about the amassments, the material crush, days and nights of bumper to bumper, red light, green light, the fixedness of things, the obsolescences, going mostly unseen. They saw the old man do his therapeutic massage, working a woman’s back and temples as she sat on a bench, her face pressed to a raised cushion attached to a makeshift frame. They read the handwritten sign, relief from fatigue and panic. How things persist, the habits of gravity and time, in this new and fluid reality. The cockney from his knees said, I don’t ask you where you get your money, don’t ask me where I get my books. They stopped and looked, browsing his cardboard box. The old Chinese stood erect, kneading the woman’s acupuncture points, thumbing the furrows behind her ears. (83)

We find here an image of the street and its associations that DeLillo valorises in the text in the details pertaining to cultural difference, bodies, the touch and “crush” of the material world of time and gravity, and those contingent variables of unknowability, opacity, “amassments” and “obsolescence”, that tend to colour this passage as metaphor for the persistence of memory and its agents, the unseen *work* of irony and the negative immanence of Otherness. For this reason we find in this ‘street economy’ the *work* of memory: *work* that goes “mostly unseen”; there isn’t here the pricking of consciousness to estrange any of the details, rather the work continues “underneath” surfaces (the work of the acupuncturist) and beneath such consciousness (beneath the road). The physical and material nature of this economy (in a contrast to Packer’s “fluid reality”) marks it as anachronistic, as an economy within memory, within time, and so we note the “obsolescences” as objects subject to the temporality of memory, which is where these objects, traditions, bodies etc. are stored and “persist”. The whole paragraph, like others DeLillo often writes, is itself an act of memory, a recording and keeping of the makeshift, day-to-day materiality of human partialities that he associates with memory. Indeed, DeLillo’s point (and here we find spectres of Benjamin’s materialism and Derrida’s own thoughts on memory) is that memory (what I have throughout been referring to also as Otherness) inheres in the material world, the world of bodies and objects, and as something to be found in the street. The world of technology must pass through this world, is, in fact, dependent on the material world, as in the body labour of the “repair crew passing fiber-optic cable down a manhole”. The sublime systems of capitalism, be they semiotic, symbolic,

technological or economic, rely on the tenderness of the material, on being tendered by labour, bodies, the street etc., for them to function, even as such systems seek to dematerialise, aestheticise, and allegorise, the material world out of consciousness.

Even Packer's "prousted"¹⁶⁰ limousine, insulated against the street, cannot prevent the seepage of street "noise" (pain, Otherness) into the sealed, theoretical, technological interior of the limousine. The noise of the street is that of pain, the root condition of mourning: "[t]hey sat in the swell of blowing horns. There was something about the noise that he did not choose to wish away. It was the tone of some fundamental ache, a lament so old it sounded aboriginal" (14). These are Packer's words and what he recognises here is the condition of pain people live in, a pain inseparable from the condition of living in history, memory, and living in the body, all of which the "futurist" attempts to transcend. Thus, despite himself, the hand of a taxi driver, with its missing finger, fascinates Packer: "Eric regarded the stub, impressive, a curious thing, a body ruin that carried history and pain" (17). With this detail, DeLillo succinctly articulates the sort of constellation that I've been suggesting is involved not only in his investigation of memory and Otherness, but also, as we shall see, in the proposal of a fallen tenderness, that is evinced in *Cosmopolis* ironically, via the presentation of its absence. Thus, the taxi driver's missing finger (again, an absence, a negative) connotes the articulating together of Otherness (cultural difference – the driver is a Sikh), pain, memory and history (all "carried" in the "ruin"), his emphasis on materiality and bodies, as well as the condition of "aboriginal" mourning expressed by the reality of the street. We note also that subtler connotation embedded in the word "ache", that suggests that the body itself is the principal object of mourning – the carrier of memory, pain and Otherness – all of which such a futurism, as personified by Packer, seeks to dismiss.

(iii) Bodies

Ibrahim's collapsed eye fascinated him in a childish way, beyond the shame of staring. [...] The eye had a kind of autonomy, a personality of its own, giving the man a splitness, an unsettling alternative self. (163)

¹⁶⁰ As with his use of the same term ("prousted") in *Underworld*, DeLillo ensures the context of his discussion – in this case, the street, the material world – is associated with the word's own context, memory.

The ruined eye, the scarred or ruined body, marks a character like Ibrahim, as a body-irony, that is to say, as an allegory characterised by the deep inscription within itself of irony (or Otherness), and this is why Ibrahim is characterised by an “autonomy” and “splitness”, an “alternative self”. The ruined aspect of his materiality (his physical appearance) inscribes an Otherness in his appearance, just as irony ‘inscribes’ an Otherness, and quality of mortification within allegory. The eye indicates to Packer that Ibrahim cannot be summed-up by tenderless allegory, and throughout *Cosmopolis* such body-ruins serve to remind us of the limitations of allegory when it is not tendered by irony; in semiotic terms, the inscription of the body, this mark of pain, represents the tenderness of the word, the mortification and Otherness of an allegory. Ibrahim’s “alternative self” signifies also the possibility of “alternative” readings, enabling, in turn, the allegorical realm itself. The material nature of the body, something heightened or foregrounded by its being “ruined” (its scarring, dismemberment, etc., the inscription of pain) is a metaphor for the fallen-ness of language; the wounding of the body parallels the wounding of allegory by irony, a process I have referred to as tendering.¹⁶¹ Body-ruins stand in for the tenderness of language, the tenderness of words, and in this way, because of this knowledge of the tenderness of allegory, raise the question of the Other, the “alternative self”, the unsaid and unknowable nature of irony. As DeLillo makes clear throughout the novels I’ve discussed, we glimpse Otherness at the point where allegory is made tender, and it is through this work of mortification that allegory itself is renewed as a “fallen wonder”.

In this regard we note the continuity between *Cosmopolis* and *The Body Artist*, where the body ‘offers’ the reader a ‘lesson’ in the semiotics and philosophy of pain and the fall. But where in *The Body Artist* Lauren sought to mourn this pain (the Otherness at the root of language, and for DeLillo the irony at the root of art and literature) through her body, Packer wants to shed his body. Where Lauren tunes into her body and its conduction of Otherness, Packer continually checks his body for the first sign of Otherness – cancer – that must then be removed. Although the body remains a fascination for Packer (a fascination attributable to the fact that he is

¹⁶¹ In a further qualification we can say that the inscription of pain on the body (scarring and dismemberment) stands also for a form of writing that resembles the resistant and unknowable qualities of irony attributed, in effect I argue, by DeLillo to literature and art. As we saw with *The Body Artist*, the novel’s qualities as ethical and artistic articulation of Otherness are as a consequence of an author’s mortification and dismemberment (ironising) of its form, its status as representation.

beginning to have “doubts” (32; 86) about his allegorisation of the world), the body is, ultimately, subsumed within his narcissism, its Otherness diminished by being encoded within the fetishistic and masochistic scheduling of a daily prostate examination. As Packer considers, in the prostate exam,

[t]he pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words. It was a point of hellish perception that was steady-state, unchanging in degree, and not a point at all but some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness, but not that either, located at the base of his bladder. He operated from within. He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology. (50)

The possibility of the perception of Others and Otherness (“to speak of other things”, to speak from some “other brain”) is a possibility to be found in one’s very own body (one’s own Otherness) when it becomes articulate in pain. As Packer later considers after shooting himself in his hand, “the pain was the world” (201), and in the present quotation we see how it is both “local” and present in everything around Packer – “objects”, the street, language. Pain, as I have been suggesting, is significant for DeLillo in the way in which it ushers Otherness into our allegorical settlement of the world – pain casts a doubt on our allegories, making them tender. Such is the case, it appears for Packer who, with his “pants around his ankles and butt flung back” asks himself such “large” philosophical questions as “why something and not nothing? Why music and not noise?” (50). The painful palpation of Packer’s prostate thus coincides with his own probing of certain allegorical assumptions, and in so doing he is probing irony – the condition between “something” or “nothing”, “music” or “noise”, the *différance* or Otherness that is their provenance.

And it is something like the principle of irony – as force of pain, in fact, inseparable from his experience of pain – which Packer begins to understand when language (a word “asymmetry”), becomes part of his body. In a sense, the body, as site of Otherness and pain, introduces irony into allegory, into language, in the process estranging Packer from his allegorical “mastery of ideas and people”.

He liked to track answers to hard questions. This was his method, to attain mastery of ideas and people. But there was something about the idea of asymmetry. It was intriguing in the world outside the body, a counterforce to balance and calm, the riddling little twist, subatomic, that made creation happen. There was the serpentine word itself, slightly off kilter, with the single additional letter that changes everything. But when he removed the word from its cosmological register and applied it to the body of a male mammal, his body, he began to feel pale and spooked. He felt a certain perverse reverence toward the word. A fear of, a distance from. When he heard the word spoken in a context of urine and semen and when he thought of the word in the shadow of pissed pants, one, and limp-dick desolation, two, he was haunted to the point of superstition. (52)

As I have hinted, the principle of asymmetry,¹⁶² the “riddling little twist”, is that of irony, the said unbalanced by the ‘unsaid’, the sign placed in pain and doubt by the counterforces of loss, absence and difference – Otherness. This force intrigues Packer as an abstraction, a philosophy of world, and he even grants it the force Derrida grants Otherness – the force of invention that makes “creation happen”. But when this word is considered from the perspective of a body (his body) in language – and despite his futurist hope to transcend his fleshly state, Packer, the text is at pains to point out, is still very much a body¹⁶³ – the word, and the principle it stands for (irony) is acknowledged as the source of the fear, doubt, pain that Packer (like the symbolic economy he represents) spends his narrative attempting to leave behind and transcend. The “perverse reverence” Packer feels for this “fear” is a consequence of his association of it with the loss of control and mastery – “limp dick desolation”. His response to this fear (of asymmetry, irony) has been to make a ritual out of the process of inquiry and information-gathering that the prostate exam represents. Indeed, Packer has turned this ritual into an aspect of “superstition”; essentially, a mode of mourning (*à la* paranoia) that relies on the elevation of the allegorical (information and technology) to an almost transcendental state, whereby the pain of doubt, aporia, opacity, irony and Otherness can be repressed and misprised through the force of ‘unreasonable’ and outrageous connection. The mode of mourning Packer commits to – his allegorising of pain and Otherness, his recourse to ritualised allegory and superstition – is indistinguishable from his desire to transcend his body-state. In the “whirling” dance of the mourners in the funeral procession of Brutha Fez, Packer sees an expression of his wish to get beyond pain.

Because whirl is all. Whirl is the drama of shedding everything. Because they are spinning into communal grace, he thought. And because someone is dead tonight and only whirl can appease their grief.

He believed these things. He tried to imagine a kind of fleshlessness. He thought of the whirlers deliquescing, resolving into fluid states, into spinning liquid, rings of water and fog that eventually disappear in air. (138)

¹⁶² Later it is such a principle (“the importance of the lopsided, the thing that’s skewed a little [...] the little quirk, the misshape [...] the answer [...] in your body, in your prostate” (200)) that Levin proposes as the type of understanding Packer has missed and that has undone him – his failure to perceive irony.

¹⁶³ Packer’s body becomes an emphasis in the text by virtue of his complete neglect of it: through his displays of food consumption, his increasing body-odour, as well as his increasingly shabby appearance, stained with food, crème, alcohol, sweat, sexual fluid. We note also the concordance of his passage through New York with his stripping of clothing, and the asymmetrical details of half a haircut, and a single shot hand. Packer is marooned in corporeality, and it is through the trope of asymmetry that, in part, this is presented in the text. Again, the emphasis on the body equates to an emphasis on irony that, for all his supposed mastery, Packer is helpless to control or avoid.

This desire to escape the flesh is the same hope Packer holds for his transfiguration into pure data. The whirl of the dance is for Packer a whirl of technology – a way of voiding this life and its pain and memories, and transcending to some aesthetic state.

(iv) Masochism and False Mourning

It may seem too obvious a remark to linger on, but in a text as consciously shaped around one character's wilful plunge into self-ruin (Packer's "haircut" – slang for a dramatic loss on the share market – as well as his hunting down of his own assassin) it needs to be pointed out that Packer's relationship to what I have been calling pain is circumscribed by masochism. The expression of pain is the reason why Packer works out as hard as he does, to feel muscle-pain; it is the reason why he asks to be electrocuted by his bodyguard, Kendra Hayes, with her stun-gun, just as it is also why he enjoys the pain of the vodka she pours on his testicles (114). The point for DeLillo, it seems, is that the evocation of masochism explains Packer's relationship to his body and, through the body, his relationship to Otherness and memory. The missing piece in this association is cancer (within Packer's cosmology it is cancer that joins the body, memory and Otherness, doubt and pain), the pain or doubt harboured in the body and which comports within itself the memory of Packer's father's death. Packer's masochism, revealed in this context, appears to be a mode of mourning (contra the sort of ethical or artistic mourning I have elaborated previously) designed to extinguish the Otherness (pain) of memory and with this, the pain of all non-coincidence, seen in the world as other people, and, in language, as irony.

Something of the quality of this mourning is apparent in the ironies of Packer's relation to pain and the body, through his masochistic treatment and valorisation of body pain. In the pain of his prostate exam he is aware that

He was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory even as he was shaping it under the measured effect of barbells and weights. He wanted to judge it redundant and transferable. It was convertible to wave arrays of information. (48)

In a seeming contradiction, the pain of exercise translates the body from its corporeal state into something more nearly aesthetic, closer to information. As we will see, this desire for translation (the dematerialisation of the material into the aesthetic) is singularly determining of Packer's mourning as well as the American futurism

DeLillo critiques. We note also the connection, in a later scene, DeLillo makes between the sensations caused by Packer's electrocution with the "haircut" Packer takes on the Yen.¹⁶⁴ Both experiences are acts of masochism and both offer Packer a momentary release from "reason" (115), the "influence of his neo-cortex" as well as the "need to take inspired action, make original judgments, maintain independent principles and convictions, all the reasons why people are fucked up and birds and rats are not" (115). Packer uses pain to attain release from the demands of being human – and it is this that is behind his dreamed-of conversion of the body into "wave arrays of information" (48). In effect, the experience of willed body-pain becomes a way of avoiding (as a form of false mourning) the pain of memory and Otherness harboured in the body.

The pain and sense of "neo-cortex-less" Otherness that Packer appears to 'enjoy' suffering is, then, to the purpose of diminishing the recalcitrance of pain and Otherness as they actually exist. This sort of process of diminishment is further modelled in Packer's exchanges with Kendra, when he meets her for an intimate liaison. To Packer, Kendra (a bodyguard, a person with a formalised relationship to pain) is a woman of "straps and belts" (114); even when naked she appears as a punisher, a dominatrix. Noticeably she is pure image, purely superficial to Packer, her Otherness (her body) completely aestheticised: details pertaining to her "coral brown skin and well defined cheekbones" (111); the "beeswax sheen to her lips" (111); "cinnamon skin, or russet, or a blend of copper and bronze" (112); "her skin [...] foxy brown" (113), repeat as the treatment of her appearance in the text ("[h]e wanted her to move slightly left so that her hip would catch the glow of the table lamp nearby" (113)) becomes indissociable from her status as figure of desire and punishment. This is entirely consistent with the masochist's relation to the Other and Otherness (the dominatrix)¹⁶⁵ where the Other is 'converted' into nothing more than a dematerialised sign. In this sort of relationship, the subject's experience of pain acts as a blind behind which the operation of power (the control of Otherness through its aestheticisation) masks its machinations, and becomes inconspicuous. Packer's false mourning of pain and Otherness thus manifests as a conspicuous performance of pain that, in becoming

¹⁶⁴ In this way also we see how DeLillo connects the subjective details of Packer's masochism and mourning with the broader and systemic details of a culture/economy's mourning.

¹⁶⁵ See Nick Mansfield's *Masochism: the Art of Power* (1997), and the interpretation of this masochistic model made by Patrick Evans in "Whipping up a Local Culture" in *Landfall* 209. 2005. pp.137-152.

ritualised, becomes unquestioned – the result is an aestheticised simulation of pain that is designed to replace and mask the Otherness, difference and irony (pain) the semiotic cannot successfully allegorise. For DeLillo, it seems, a culture evincing such a mourning thus responds to Otherness, loss and memory through the spectacular production of allegories that serve to sublimate Otherness.

The masochism of Packer, understood as an attempt to diminish the Other, finds expression in the culture's desire to slip the bonds of memory through its assertion of a technological/allegorical sublime that is itself a dissembling masquerade of Otherness. This is what DeLillo has observed in the following often-quoted passage.

In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. [...] The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment has no limit.¹⁶⁶

A future in ruins is a future that becomes uncertain, doubtful, and *painful*. Such a future becomes, then, one that Americans respond to by way of false mourning – through massive consumption and commodity production, through, as DeLillo has suggested, the exercise of overwhelming technological (and hence, allegorical) power¹⁶⁷, a power that Packer is correct to assert works best when there is no “memory attached” (184). A future in ruins is then one in which the relationship to memory and the past has been severed. The consequence, as *Cosmopolis* demonstrates, and Packer experiences, is what amounts to a crisis of anteriority: the future can no longer be anterior (future) when there is no term or temporal condition from which to exist in anteriority. As such, the future becomes conflated with the present, becomes an anachronism (time “out of joint”), becomes obsolete, becomes merely an allegory severed from the possibility of iteration, *différance*, anteriority, marooned in repetition – a sign sliding over other signs, just as commodities repeat,

¹⁶⁶ “In the Ruins of the Future”. Ibid. p38.

¹⁶⁷ For DeLillo the response to the uncertainty and pain of the future triggered by 9/11 revealed a will to reassert through massive displays of consumption and technology an attempt to occupy a future separated from the requirements of mourning, from memory, pain and loss.

I think the curious psychological subtext to the war in Iraq was to return America to its sense of the future, a feeling that had been damaged by the events of September 11 [...] We're using our technological imperative in order to win a struggle that concerns the past and the future. This is not something that's at all overt, but I think the element exists at some level of our exertions against terrorists and the Iraq situation as well. We want to live in the future. (Interview with Helena Bertodano, “And Quiet Goes the Don” in *The Daily Telegraph*, 13/5/03).

This could double as a description of the desires of Packer as it describes the contexts of futurism, technology and allegory that are central to *Cosmopolis's* exploration of American mourning in capitalism.

become obsolete and repeat. Allegory without history – its relation to memory, Otherness and irony – becomes invisible as allegory. This relationship of allegory to temporality – a relationship enabled by the presence of irony and Otherness in allegory – is what the next section is about.

(v) Temporality and Allegory

For DeLillo, it seems, the loss of memory and Otherness and the crisis of history in the postmodern of late capitalism described in *Cosmopolis* can be seen to stem from a language problem, specifically, the absence of irony in allegory, the reification of allegory into a ritualised form. In essence, what this ritualised version of allegory represents is the conflation of sign and commodity, self and sign, and with this, the assertion of such allegory as adequate to Otherness and temporality (the two, as I have said, operating as synonyms for each other here). I shall return to the question of temporality shortly. But for now, it is the condition of allegory (the “rhetoric of temporality”, as de Man has put it) and its tendency towards ritualisation in DeLillo’s vision of capitalism that I shall consider.

Allegory loses its vital relationship to anteriority (the possibility of our experience of duration in time) in the capitalist symbolic when it becomes ritualised (commodified) and severed from the relationship to irony that enables allegory as vehicle of iteration and *différance*. DeLillo, when asked about his interest in ritual, the processes of ritualisation and its consequences, provides this useful gloss:

In *The Names* my interest was the way in which a mind centered on ritual can so easily slip off into violence. I thought that ritual stripped from the world becomes dangerous, becomes violent. It loses its connection. It’s almost pure silence devolving into nuclear weaponry, in a curious way, in the way a theory, a formula on a blackboard, like $E=mc^2$, progresses into a bomb explosion on the other side of the world. It’s a little like that. These people had removed themselves from the world. And they were acting out of an impetus of pure mind. I felt this could lead to what it did lead to: ritual killings.¹⁶⁸

What is referred to here, as “ritual stripped away from the world”, is what we can think of as allegory stripped from Otherness, language stripped from irony. *Cosmopolis*, with its preponderance of theory and theorists, associates violence (Packer and Levin) with such displays of “pure mind”, such allegories, as I have been saying, of those who have “removed themselves from the world” – in fact, from the

¹⁶⁸From “Writing as a Deeper Form of Concentration”, and interview with DeLillo by Maria Moss, conducted on November 14, 1988 in Berlin. Appeared in *Sources* #6, 1999, pp82-87.

pain and Otherness of the world. The process outlined in DeLillo's quote is pure capitalism, the progression of aestheticisation (theory, etc.) to the production of a sublime referent (in this case, the bomb). In *Cosmopolis*, the sublime condition is one of pure data, where the body and memory are left behind for a world of information, life and immortality on a disk, "an idea beyond the body" (105).

Within the futurism of 'Packerian' capitalism, commodity production is conflated with allegory production in such a way as to make the allegorisation of reality a "sacred" covenant. The result, as Packer here witnesses, is pure spectacle, simulation divorced from Otherness, a mode of representation divorced from "the world that provokes it".¹⁶⁹

He stood behind her, pointing over her shoulder. Beneath the data strips, or tickers, there were fixed digits marking the time in the major cities of the world. He knew what she was thinking. Never mind the speed that makes it hard to follow what passes before the eye. The speed is the point. Never mind the urgent and endless replenishment. The way data dissolves at one end of the series just as it takes shape at the other. This is the point, the thrust, the future. We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle. Or information made sacred, ritually unreadable. The small monitors of the office, home and car become a kind of idolatry here, where crowds might gather in astonishment. (80)

Allegory – signified here by the "tickers" representing commodity information – becomes "unreadable" at the point of its ritualisation, which is to say, at the point where information replaces reality with itself as referent. In this scheme, the relationship of allegory and *différance* is severed, delay and deferral so crucial to our experience of narrative, duration, history and difference are replaced by "blur" and "speed" where the "endless replenishment" of signs is a given. With the acceleration of allegory – through the fusing of commodity and technology – Otherness is diminished and, as compensation, we have the "thrust" into the "future". The loss of the Other, this misprision of Otherness, is what sustains (and produces) Packer's dream of the future, and his (our) credulity towards cyber-capital and technology corresponds directly to the acceleration that makes allegory invisible, "unreadable". By this invisibility, the separation of word and world animated in Otherness, irony and pain, is missed, and capitalism's false mourning proceeds. In a sense, then, and this explains the religious language of this passage, the "future" replaces the Other through its simulation of Otherness; the allegorical future resembles the messianic in Packerian capitalism. But only 'resembles', since, as Derrida has shown, the future (as future) like the messiah and Other, never can return; it never arrives. This is, then, the

¹⁶⁹ "In the Ruins of the Future". Ibid. p.34.

negative structure built into capitalism's appeal to the sublime object or referent – its simulation of Otherness is matched by the simulated irony of the Other's presentation – which is to say, specifically, its constant deferral. The irony at work in such an economy of simulation is explained by Packer's "negative theology" where the forms of his 'faith' – technology, allegory, commodity – have supplanted the object of 'faith': God. Our "astonishment", as DeLillo has said, is technology, not God, allegory itself, ritualised, not the Other(ness) of its provenance or reference. If this system appears to operate as a negative structure, in the manner of irony, in truth, this, too, is a simulation, since the structure in fact relies on a forgetting of the past, of memory, the misprision of Otherness, via an 'irony' that it has no need to foreground or declare – an irony that in fact is recognised by Levin as "lying". The Other is missed – this is the structural objective of such capitalism – to the purpose of commodity and semiotic production, and none of what is produced is designed to remember (mourn) this missing, the Other and what I have been referring to as the pain of the world and its fallen language.¹⁷⁰

In *Cosmopolis*, time becomes DeLillo's main category for the consideration of Otherness. The 'time' of pain is, we might consider, time itself, unmargined by language¹⁷¹, untethered to system or capital; pain is time before and beyond technology, the force that mortifies what we think of as the future. This time resembles an Otherness I associate with pain but not merely pain as affective state (ego-pain), but as allegory for non-coincidence, delay, split, etc.¹⁷² Our experience of time is keyed to our experience of language. When allegory becomes a commodity, then, so too, our experience of time, lacking relation to Otherness (memory) comes to be expressed by the economy of the commodity, becomes the constant restatement of a present and no new thing. This association of time and allegory helps explain one of the more enigmatic considerations of the text, the depiction of temporal discontinuity.

¹⁷⁰ Mourning as forgetting is what such commodity production represents. As such, the work of art, the work that remembers the conditions of its production, mourning through its remembering of the condition of its very reproducibility – Otherness and irony – is thus, by DeLillo's 'argument', to be seen as distinct from the commodity.

¹⁷¹ In a sense Tuttle is DeLillo's paradigmatic condensation of Otherness, a body, composed of memory, and "lost" in time – in a sense, an emissary of time itself – associated with pain, loss, and mourning, and whose language use serves to foreground the very fallen nature of our own constitution in language as tender allegorists, fallen-language users.

¹⁷² This is not to suggest that time is equivalent to grief, only that time is alien (Other) to our attempts at measuring it, though we construct and experience time for ourselves through allegory (de Man) time itself remains Other to allegory. Thus, allegories are always delayed. In this chapter pain is the term I use for this condition of delay, deferral, non-coincidence, Otherness and irony.

The following occurs as part of Packer's experience of an explosion he witnesses on his monitor seconds before it actually happens.

His own image caught his eye, live on the oval screen beneath the spycam. Some seconds passed. He saw himself recoil in shock, More time passed, He felt suspended, waiting. Then there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all information around him. He recoiled in shock. Everyone did. The phrase was part of the gesture, the familiar expression, embodied in the motion of the head and the limbs. He recoiled in shock. The phrase reverberated in the body. (93)

By one reading, we can see how the pain of temporal dislocation places in relief Packer's subordination to language, how instinctual his particular mourning is in taking recourse to dead language, the cliché, "recoil in shock", that recovers experience as some sort of reflex translation. Marooned in his Other-less, irony-less, totalised language economy (the commodity-symbolic) Packer's experience is reduced to the most "familiar" representation of it. But of course, the sensation of this disjointed temporality is not so much an effect of Packer (his body) responding to the world (the street, in this case, a bomb), but rather his response to a mediated world, to the world as translated for him through his technologies of representation (allegory) – the computers and cameras in his limousine. The "shock" to which Packer "recoils" has its origins not so much in the world, as in the representation of that world; in a sense, in responding to his monitor screen Packer is responding to a repetition, and it is this conflation of world with representation that, in fact, explains what we can think of as the crisis of temporality that results from the failure to mourn the pain and Otherness of time *itself*.¹⁷³ As Packer says, "time is a thing that grows scarcer every day" (69); time's "scarcity" correlates to the replacement of temporal delay and difference (time itself, as Otherness) with repetition. The reason for this is the false mourning of time and Otherness I have been considering for the past three chapters, so associated with the fusion of allegory, technology and commodity, and expressed in the idol status of the personal computer. Technology – thus constellated – diminishes pain and Otherness, or, as Kinski puts it, "computer power eliminates doubt" (86).

¹⁷³ Both Lauren and Packer seem adepts of future vision, both seem to be able to read or experience events before they happen. For Lauren this is due to her "hyperpreparedness" for imagination, her hosting of Otherness. Packer, on the other hand, appears to intuit future events because of his superb skill in reading the sublime, mediated world. He doesn't anticipate the future, or the Other, but rather its allegorisation. It is not the real he anticipates but what passes for the real; the mediated event of the real is what Packer can anticipate, and it is this that is meant when it is said that he can read the future. As representing and translating subjectivities, Lauren and Packer represent two opposites: the artist and the capitalist.

Without “doubt”, temporality itself becomes an expression of the commodity-symbolic, where it is reproduced as a “furtive sameness” (*U*, 786), the result of a loss of difference or “nuance” (*U*, 785). In such a condition, time becomes an experience of slippage, like that mirrored in commodity production and the commodity-symbolic’s production of allegories and signs that, because indistinguishable and arbitrary, constantly efface each other, sliding over one another in a constant slippage more accurately referred to as repetition – what Benjamin characterises in the Modern as the production of novelty without change. The index for this ritualised version of allegory is, of course, money, just as it is money that comes to express the crisis of temporality in the evacuated, non-tender allegories of Packerian capitalism. Kinski (Packer’s high priest of ritualised theory and allegory – note that Packer picks her up outside the Church of St. Mary the Virgin (78)) makes this clear:

[...] money has taken a turn. All wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There’s no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself [...] And property follows of course. (77)

Kinski’s analysis of the condition of money, in fact, doubles as a description of allegory without temporality – allegory turned, as money is, into meaningless signs that no longer refer to anything other than more signs. Hence the ritualised nature of allegory, and hence Kinski’s attempt to explain temporal discontinuity through an analogy of the market and a theory of money:

‘Money makes time. It used to be the other way around. Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism. People stopped thinking about eternity. They began to concentrate on hours, measurable hours, man-hours, using labour more efficiently. [...]

It’s cyber-capital that creates the future. [...]

Because time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. (79)

Money has become self-referring, just as time does for Eric when it begins to rehearse or quote itself in his experience – the ritualisation of allegory is central to this. The future that Packer wants to occupy cannot exist; it is, in fact, a misrecognised (mediated) replay of reality, not a future reality but a loop of allegorised commodity reality, which is why it is always mediated by technology – it isn’t that technology predicts the future, but that it is “cyber-capital that creates the future” (79) – a future that is ‘out of time’, a simulation of time. Packer’s belief that technology reveals the future is, thus, a statement about his successful misprision of Otherness and his credulity to technologised allegory. This is possible in Packer’s world because of the precession of allegories, commodities and money that have replaced time. Without the

articulation of memory and difference provided by irony, allegory is made vulnerable to the force of acceleration that sees it become a commodity form; allegory loses its narrative structure – the quality of duration, history, and memory – in the way that Kinski says money has. In a sense, money describes the fate of allegory in the capitalist symbolic.

Part Two: Language and Mourning

(i) Packer and the Mirror of Language

Packer's refusal of memory (his ushering of words into obsolescence) reveals both his experience of temporality and allegory, since time (as Otherness and memory) is something he seeks to control through his mastery of allegory. Thus, to understand Packer's temporal predicament, we have to consider his "philosophy" of language, and what is distinctive about this language philosophy is its refusal of irony and *différance*. Without delay or deferral, Packer is lost in atemporality, time itself is "out of joint", experienced as like the slippage of one sign over another, as like the stacking or queuing-up of presents. Without the possibility of difference, the future and the present conflate and become indistinguishable. As Packer later wonders: "[h]ave all the worlds conflated, all possible states become present at once?" (205). As we will see, DeLillo's portrayal of the travails of Packer is also a portrait of the travails of language within the capitalist postmodern. Having established "pain" as DeLillo's evocation of the *a priori* condition of being-in-the-world (being in New York), and after having begun to associate this pain with the 'street', the 'body', the 'Other' and, of course, time itself, we can now come to the issue of mourning – how this pain is regarded, treated, and conceived. From this consideration, we will see into the lives and motivations of Packer and Levin, their memories, but also the function of capitalism's symbolic economy. The temporal disruptions *Cosmopolis* records, along with the violence and the intimations of terror the text presents, all return the reader to DeLillo's ethical demand – the mourning of pain, of Otherness and world, in the economy of language. What *Cosmopolis* shows is how this mourning is misrecognised and avoided, and how, as a consequence, tenderness and irony too are missed.

Specifically, Packer's philosophy of language misses the tenderness of representation itself; he misses the fact that it is our methods of representation (allegory) that are tender – underdetermining – when he assumes that what is represented is a match for reality. Primarily, the fault lies in his narcissism, where his own private and subjective experience of the external world is taken to be definitive of the world. Packer's "self" is thus an effect of his capacity to name and master the world, and, *vice versa*, the world is an effect of his subjectivity, his capacity to 'know' it.¹⁷⁴ Thus, Packer's existential statement: "when he died he would not end. The world would end" (6). But, of course, there is a great fragility implicit in such a solipsistic outlook, since the threat of Otherness – the unmasterable, untranslatable and ironic – may, if repressed, return to devastate the subject's relation to self and world. The threat of such an Otherness is, of course, as I have shown previously, the motor that drives Packer's philosophy and, more generally, capitalism's false mourning as a systemic misrecognition of the Other. We note, then, a kind of desperation and desire at work in Packer's 'investment' in irony-less allegory, and, with this, the accuracy of Elise's assessment of him as "dedicated to knowing" (19), the successful fusion of "science and ego combined" (70). The necessity of this fusion is explained by the wilfulness with which Packer misprizes pain. For Packer this misprision of pain is what fuels, and manifests as, his addiction to the "astonishments" of technology.

Without a theory of tenderness or irony (the capacity to faithfully mourn the Other), the painful split between word and world hardens into a binary – what Packer calls the "zero-oneness of the world" (24).

He looked past Chin towards streams of numbers running in opposite directions. He understood how much it meant to him, the roll and flip of data on a screen. He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing, and chambered shell. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (24)

¹⁷⁴ We see this in incidental scenes such as when Packer regards a seagull: "he'd been interested once and had mastered the teeming details of bird anatomy [...] he mastered the steepest matters in half an afternoon [...] admiring the bird, thinking into it, trying to know the bird" (7). The bird, here, as in *The Body Artist*, stands in for the Other. On another occasion, after his interlude with Didi Fancher, the name of a plant he had failed to name returns to him and with it a reconfirmed sense of his identity: "he knew who he was ..." (32).

Of course, what is described here is still an interpretative position of privilege, and Packer is one of the few able to determine the “knowable and whole”, since he has, as he puts it, the “hereditary script” (38) that enables him to see and predict the future. But something of the vulnerability (in fact missed tenderness) of Packer’s philosophy of language is apparent in his opening ‘existential’ statement in the text as well. We find here not only the basis for his private, denotative language of allegory, but also another of DeLillo’s submerged ironies.

Freud is finished, Einstein’s next. He was reading the Special Theory tonight, in English and German, but put the book aside, finally, and lay completely still, trying to summon the will to speak the single word that would turn off the lights. Nothing existed around him. There was only the noise in his head, the mind in time. (6)

Here the “single word” (a phrase recollecting Nick Shay’s endeavour to edge closer to God’s “secret”) is that of the masterful self, capable of speaking the world into (or out of) existence. But rather than the *ursprung* of existence, the word of God framed by the existential “nothing” articulated as part of Packer’s messianic egotism (“when he died he would not end. The world would end”), the word is simply the noise that turns off the lights in his room. The joke is telling, since for Packer, seemingly committed to language, his theory of language (allegory devoid of irony) is reduced to a theory of noise: the crude and anachronistic technology of voice/noise response, the product of an obsolescent theory only one remove from the high kitsch of clap-on/clap-off lighting. With this minor irony comes a statement of tragic-irony: Packer’s faith in technology for an ‘afterlife’ in cyber-consciousness is undermined by the technology (its tendency to anachronism, its tenderness to time) framing his existentialism, tied to the solipsism of his language-model lacking Otherness: “there was only the noise in his head” – the noise is language, the “mind in time” is allegory. For all his attempts to transcend to the timeless realm of pure technology, pure allegory, it is the time of the fallen world characterised by the delay and duration of language that he is marooned in. The “noise” in his head is also the “noise” of the street that he attempts to diminish by prousting his limousine. In both cases, this noise represents the pain of memory and Otherness, and, moreover, the association of such Otherness and pain with the fallen nature of being-in-language and being-in-time. A “noise” theory of language is one where words and signs are reduced to the condition of being merely a surface, one that maps or matches reality. In this instance, this surface/noise analogy for language explains the lack of depth, iteration, difference and irony in Packer’s

conception of language. Language becomes a mimetic surface, something to match oneself to, to recognise oneself by, and to map the world with.¹⁷⁵

As I'm suggesting, such a language philosophy offers Packer a sense of contiguity with the world by falsely offering both a capacity to see himself in the world and the world in himself. The text's primary expression of this condition comes in Packer's statement of regard for his own apartment tower. Here we find the basis of a philosophy of language – limited to mimesis – that explains the inadequacy of his mode of mourning.

He felt contiguous with it. It was eighty-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass. [...]

The tower gave him strength and depth. [...] The one virtue of its surface was to skim and bend the river light and mime the tides of open sky. There was an aura of texture and reflection. He scanned its length and felt connected to it, sharing the surface and the environment that came into contact with the surface, from both sides. A surface separated inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other. He'd thought about surfaces in the shower once. He put on his sunglasses. (8)

We note then the importance Packer attributes to the “bronze” surface of the tower with its capacity to “mime” and “reflect” the world. By this ‘bronzing’ a connection between surface and environment is made – this is the dream of Packer's “aesthetics of interaction” that reveals the dependency of Packer's mourning on mimesis. What I have referred to as the bronzing of reality is the force of mimetic allegory, and as we have seen, the term (bronze) is one developed through *Underworld*.¹⁷⁶ “Bronze” for DeLillo is a term that connects capitalism's symbolic order of consumption and technology with the aesthetic imperative of non-tender allegory. In *Cosmopolis* we see references to a bronzed statue of a man hailing a cab – an attempt to both aestheticise and encase the life of the street, as well as Packer's description of the interior of his limousine – a haven in “bronzy light” (179).¹⁷⁷ We note too the concordance of the bronzy light with the “ceiling mural” in Packer's car that, true to the force of mapping, measuring and aestheticising that this word (bronze) represents

¹⁷⁵ Packer's enthusiasm for poetry is significant here: he reads not so much for ‘literary’ reasons, or pleasure, as for mimetic considerations, such as the regulation of his breathing set to the spacing between words. This also explains his easy dismissal of Freud and Einstein as no longer mimetically accurate, and of course, what we see here is the complete lack of a theory of iteration, interpretation and memory, as, for Packer at least, these theories simply cease being useful over time, become obsolete (anachronistic) as outdated products and terms (like “skyscraper”) he dismisses from language.

¹⁷⁶ See references to the tower Nick works in in Phoenix, see also the dominant hue of the Bruegel print, the thoughts of the historian and mourner Albert Bronzini (all in *Underworld*), and see also the essay “In the Ruins of the Future” where the term is associated with institutions of capitalism.

¹⁷⁷ And of course, Kendra Hays too, as aestheticised object, is described by Packer as a “blend of copper and bronze” (112).

for DeLillo, shows “the arrangement of the planets at the time of [Packer’s] birth” (179). The bronze surface of Packer’s apartment tower is also the key to the other concern of Packer’s meditations on his tower, the relation of “inside” and “out”, “one” and the “other”. When allegory is reduced to the quality of a mimetic surface, Packer feels he has connected world and self. Not only do we see here, then, Packer’s philosophy of language as mirror but, in his connection of self and world, we see how he sees himself as indissociable from this surface, himself as mediating data, an “embodied” technology of allegory, a monument to capitalism. Thus, in his regarding of the World Trade Centre Towers we are not surprised to find Packer identifying, even empathising, with these structures:

They looked empty from here. He liked that idea. They were made to be the last tall things, made empty, designed to hasten the future. They were the end of the outside world. They weren’t here, exactly. They were in the future, a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it. (36)

The World Trade Centre Towers represent the zenith of the commodity-symbolic of capitalism, a monument not just to capitalism, but to its power of allegory; they stand as monuments to the power of signification, representation, and the power of an economy to assert presence, totality, theory, and allegory. Kinski’s reference to Packer’s own tower – “you live in a tower that soars to heaven and goes unpunished by God” (103) – is even more true of the Bank towers that, like the tower of Babel to which Kinski refers, attempt, under the aegis of capitalism, the usurpation of the “astonishing” power of God – the word, the perfect allegory.

What Packer celebrates about the towers, how they signify the “end of the outside world” is a consequence of his own belief in an overly denotative, mimetic language philosophy. Without the Otherness of an “outside world”, all conception of history and memory – and with these the notions of *différance* and iteration – are lost, consigned to obsolescence. We see this in the way in which, for Packer, certain words become obsolete when they no longer mirror ‘reality’.¹⁷⁸ There is no sense for Packer of an “afterlife” for such words, or for words and allegories in general – which is why his theory of allegory, lacking irony, is not in fact allegorical at all. There is no sense here of words signifying-on in living memory, signifying differently for Others, and for this reason Packer’s language philosophy is atemporal and ahistorical, relying on the notion that for language to be useful and justified it must fully satisfy, while also

¹⁷⁸ Examples can be found throughout the text, including “skyscraper” (9); “airports” (22); “ATM” (54); “walkie talkie” (102).

proposing the unimpeachable presence of its referent. There is no tenderness here, no conception of language as vulnerable because of what it misses or because it is fallen, or for the consideration of language as used within a community of users. As representative of a sort of language philosophy within the postmodern of late capitalism, Packer in fact appears as a kind of poststructural anachronism, entirely constructed by language, not so much a 'self' as a construct of language. In effect, he represents a poststructuralism that lacks a theory of irony and that misprizes the untranslatable immanence of Otherness. We note the sovereignty that language appears to have over Packer in the way that phrases uttered by others ("let it express itself"; "recoil in shock") become almost fated in his actions.¹⁷⁹ Packer is as trapped in a prison house of language as Levin is "trapped" (155) in the "dead light" of stars; both men are trapped in the temporality of dead allegory, a present that is constantly recapitulated, constantly feeding back on itself. Without a sense of the irony of language – the ironies in language – both men have little sense of the Otherness of time (time as immanent memory, as possibility), and consequently, also, both misperceive allegory by excluding from it its relation to difference. By repressing irony in allegory, allegory, as trope of temporality, ceases to offer either man the possibility of imagining a future, and a way of asserting subjective agency.¹⁸⁰ Such failing of imagination and agency is encapsulated in the 'artist' of the novel, Benno Levin.

¹⁷⁹ For this reason, Levin's pronouncement on Packer's death – "he is dead, word for word" (55) – is more accurate than he may imagine since Packer himself is all sign, the product of a commodity-symbolic of repetition, of one sign for another without "nuance" to distinguish between them; the phrase Levin uses, "word for word", meaning *to repeat*, we note, is also a repetition of Packer's use of the phrase.

¹⁸⁰ Such a failure of agency is most clearly apparent in the fated-quality of Packer's death-ward drive. Fate becomes a sort of non-ironic irony, a substitute for Otherness, a sort of transcendental ideal to live by, much in the manner of paranoia and superstition, whereby the demands of others, Otherness, memory, and personality, can be overlooked. Throughout all his actions Packer is merely performing a predestined script written for him in the commodity-symbolic, by his compulsion to the allegorical imperatives of this symbolic. Packer's theorist, Kinski, articulates this fate when she speaks of this symbolic and its allegorical control and manufacturing of time:

'[T]ime is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent. This is why something will happen soon, maybe today,' she said, looking slyly into her hands. 'To correct the acceleration of time. Bring nature back to normal, more or less.' (79)

This 'correction' is, of course, Packer's fated death. Fate, as such, isn't fate at all, but merely the machinations of the symbolic, and it is one of the great ironies of the novel that Packer, because of his refusal of irony, mistakes fate, and mistakes also the possibility of asserting agency and imagination and 're-writing' his life.

(ii) Levin. “Where do I stand in this light?”

Levin, it seems, is the result of DeLillo’s pessimistic conjecture as to the impact of the commodity-symbolic on modes of representation and allegory, and the sort of allegories and art that, left to itself, such a symbolic might produce. In simple terms, Levin is DeLillo’s imagining of an ‘artist’ as helplessly intricately within the sort of language philosophy Packer, as exemplary capitalist, maintains.¹⁸¹ Levin, we might consider, is posed by DeLillo as an artist/author figure in *Cosmopolis* for the reason that he represents a set of failures that, in truth, disqualify him from being one of DeLillo’s ‘artists’. Chief among these failings are the refusal of Otherness and the misrecognition of irony, but also a tendency towards a literalist praxis that includes in its repertoire repetition and violence. As author-figure, Levin is revealed to be the dupe of a completely impoverished philosophy, something expressed by Levin’s question that, chronologically speaking, is the last utterance of the novel: “[s]o what is left that’s worth the telling?” (61).

How cruel Levin must feel his fate to be that his beloved allegory is not what he had thought it to be; not only is allegory the fallen “dead light” of a lost referent, it is a light that “traps” him when he is made helpless to, and a victim of, the allegories of others (in particular, the allegories others hold of him). Without a theory of the fallen and ruined nature of allegory – of the *work* of irony within allegory – Levin is left, philosophically speaking, with no other way to conceive of language but as mimetic, and, as a result, he tends towards the assertion of a manic, compensatory and paranoid allegorical symbolic. A manifestation of this symbolic can be seen in Levin’s response to the perceived ‘deadness’ at the root of allegory. Rather than tendering this ‘death’ or absence as the force of irony within allegory, Levin attempts to “fix” allegory through the performance of an act that will reconnect world and word. This is the base motivation behind his ‘work of art’, his impossible book that he refers to as, “the literature of a life awake and asleep, because dreams too, and little stabs of

¹⁸¹ Essentially, Levin is a poor, dispossessed, version of Packer, the ‘artist’ to his ‘capitalist’, if you like, but both are versions of each other; indeed, both characters are conflated by DeLillo when he brings them together in Levin’s apartment. Here Packer and Levin seem less like persons as like words when, in the text, they are referred to as the “subject” and the “other” (see: 186, 187, 189, 193, 196, 199). The effect is one of ambiguation: “subject” and “other” merge and switch, suggesting a sort of homogenisation of subjectivity and difference that, in the commodity-symbolic, DeLillo appears to suggest, is the parallel experience of the fate of art to become indistinguishable from the commodity.

memory, and all the pitiful habits and concealments, and all the things around me would be included, noises in the street ...” (61).¹⁸² Levin hopes for “ten thousand pages that will stop the world” (152). Levin’s motivation to fix and control allegory through some dreamed-of authorial fusion of word and world is a consequence of the fact that Levin is peculiarly vulnerable to a certain limited form of allegory, to the mimetic pictures that, within his paranoid state, Levin assumes others hold of him.¹⁸³

They always said I was erratic. He is erratic. He has problems of personality and hygiene. He walks, whatever, funny. I never heard a single one of these statements but knew they were being made the way you sense something in a person’s look that does not have to be spoken. (55)

Levin’s conviction to literalism makes him “pervious” (195) and helpless to language. We note here also how irony (the unspoken communication) is reduced to paranoia, the reflex of the narcissistic personality.¹⁸⁴

I was always aware of what they said in words or looks. It is what people think they see in another person that makes his reality. If they think he walks at a slant, then he walks at a slant, uncoordinated, because this is his role in the lives around him, and if they say his clothes don’t fit, he will learn to be neglectful of his wardrobe as a means of scorning them and inflicting punishment on himself. (57)

Levin’s masochistic tendencies here correlate to a certain allegorical maladroitness, a slavishness to an imagined (because paranoid) semiotic that, as an author, he is unable to imagine differently. Ironically, Levin’s belief that his “reality” is entirely in thrall to a process of social construction is in fact recognition of the *a priori* Otherness from which the sort of tendering of self and allegory at work in irony and mourning are made possible. The perceived helplessness and lack of agency of Levin’s position are, however, a result of a fundamental misunderstanding of irony. Without a ‘theory’ of

¹⁸² But this is Levin’s wish prior to his shooting of Packer that is chronologically the last and unrecorded act of the text. The effect of the shooting is to completely unravel Levin’s desire to write his impossible book, and to attempt his salvation and mourning. The act that is supposed to define his writing radically ironises his relationship to language and he is left marooned in the silence of irony without a conception of tenderness. “What is left that’s worth the telling” (61) Levin asks, as we the reader are left with the sense that after such violence there is no need for literature; Levin is left in the silence of an irony with no demand to tender allegory, no need for this silence to signify; the death of the imagination is thus associated here, by DeLillo, with the crude and literal act of violence.

¹⁸³ Moreover, such is Levin’s susceptibility to allegory, and with this, his conviction in the literal translatability of word and world that he contracts foreign and culture-specific syndromes from the Internet. As if vulnerable to the word “virus” – its Internet context conflated with its real world applications – Levin contracts the symptoms of Korean *Hwabyung* (56), Carribean *susto* (152), and Haitian “delirious gusts in translation” (160).

¹⁸⁴ Of course, both Packer and Levin are models of a narcissism that acts as a substitution for the demands of mourning the Other and the pain of non-coincidence between self and world. Whether through the recoveries of the grandiose self (Packer) who incorporates the world and Other within his expanded, networked and masochistic self (the pun here on ‘corporation’ in light of the capitalist seems unavoidable), or the recoveries of the evacuated self whose, again, masochistic suffering at the hands of Others (Levin) is a process of his paranoid connection making, both represent the sort of false mourning DeLillo situates within capitalism and its linguistic/symbolic structures – its refusal of irony.

irony or Otherness (a sense of himself as [an] other, something precluded in the compensatory motivations of narcissism), Levin is reduced to a kind of allegorical fatalism – a sense of suffering and helplessness for which, as is made clear in *Cosmopolis*, the inevitable outcome is violence. In the end, it is violence that links Packer and Levin and defines their experience of being-in-the-world within a symbolic such as that of DeLillo's capitalism.

Something of Levin's misrecognition of irony, and with this, his disorientation in the poststructural world of loss and Otherness, is explored when he considers the question of truth and its relationship to speaking and writing. Here, also, we find a complication to Levin's conception that his "reality" is made by others, since his reality is in fact crucially shaped by his denial of Otherness and explained by something like his understanding of the lie:

It's hard for me to speak directly to people. I used to try to tell the truth. But it's hard not to lie. I lie to people because this is my language, how I talk. It's the temperature inside the head of who I am. I don't aim remarks at the person I'm speaking to but try to miss him, or glance a remark so to speak off his shoulder.

After a time I began to take satisfaction in this. It was never in me to mean what I said. Every unnecessary lie was another way to build a person. I see this clearly now. No one could help me but myself. [...]

They were not lies anyway. They were not falsehoods, most of them, but simple deflections off the listener's body, his or her shoulders, or they were total misses.

To speak directly to a person was unbearable. But in these pages I am going to write my way into truth. Trust me. (150)

The truth Levin refers to here, along with his injunction "trust me", based on his self-professed unreliability as both narrator and author (his lying, his sense of being "derived" (60)), presents the reader with the sort of example of irony that DeLillo, as with his presentation of Packer, intends to be seen as the ambient condition within which both men assert a sort of allegorical violence to the purpose of "missing" Otherness and irony. A form of "bad faith" is at work in Levin's conception of writing when in contrast to speaking or talking he conceives of writing as uncontaminated by the Other and Otherness; and yet this idea, as appealing as it must be for Levin, is so clearly undermined by his own concerns that he is a derivation, that what he writes is authored by someone else, and indeed his whole philosophy of mimeticism makes plain the simulacral quality of any such writing.¹⁸⁵ Rather than accepting Otherness (or irony) as a necessary condition of writing – *à la* Derrida and poststructuralism –

¹⁸⁵ In effect, DeLillo fuses the poverty of Levin's subjectivity with his status as author. This is evident in Levin's confession: " [...] I can only pretend to be someone. And this is why I felt derived at first, working on these pages. I didn't know if it was me that was writing so much as someone I wanted to sound like" (60).

Levin tries to repress this knowledge, and the way he does this is by translating irony (and with this his relationship to the Other) into lying, a tactic of missing, deflection and avoidance.

The now commonplace existentialism whereby one is ‘defined’ by the gaze of the Other and one’s separation from Others (expressed also in the economy of language where a ‘thing’ is defined by what the thing is *not*) is travestied here by Levin’s avoidance of the Other (the non-self), despite the fact, and the irony, that he appears to mimic this sort of negative-definition process; Levin’s “self”, being not so much a product of difference from others, but rather the denial of others, is thus a “person” “built” on a lie, on a miss.¹⁸⁶ As such, however, we begin to understand something of the pathos of Levin’s condition: he is no more than an “allegory”, a lie, a ‘fiction’, and he knows this. In contrast, and again this is a feature of his refusal of Otherness, those he observes and who surround him in society are also only allegorical persons, but persons who seem impervious to the pain of Otherness and loss that defines Levin’s experience of being allegorical.

There’s nothing in the world but other people [...] I had this thought one day. It was the thought of my life. I’m surrounded by other people. It’s buy and sell. It’s let’s have lunch. I thought look at them and look at me. Light shines through me on the street. I’m what’s the word, pervious to visible light. [...]

I thought all these other people. I thought how did they get to be who they are. It’s banks and car parks. It’s airline tickets in their computers. It’s restaurants filled with people talking. It’s people taking the merchant copy out of the leather folder and then signing it and separating the merchant copy from the customer copy and putting their credit card in their wallet. This alone could do it. It’s people who have doctors who order tests for them. This alone. [...] I’m helpless in their system that makes no sense to me. You wanted me to be a helpless robot soldier but all I could be was helpless. (195)

But why “helpless[ness]” and not tenderness? After all, Levin is on the cusp on a tender-vision of the constructed and allegorical nature of identity here. In a sense, he is right to think of himself as repository of a ‘truth’ about the fallenness of allegory underneath its consumer-oriented manifestation. But it must be remembered that this vision of Others as merely signs (a signature on a bill, for example) is entirely contingent on the terms of Levin’s narcissism; the Otherness of these people is reduced to stereotype; Levin can only see them as allegories and so his sense of isolation, of insight or ‘truth,’ is entirely a consequence of his narcissistic conceit. Without the capacity for the recognition of others (and Otherness) Levin seeks solace

¹⁸⁶ When Levin says that “every unnecessary lie was another way to build a person” the person he is referring to is himself; the distancing effect of the phrase – its use of the third person – is telling, in a sense, there is no such person as Levin. Of course, Benno Levin is a pseudonym, but the point is that the fictional quality of this suggests the pseudonymous quality of being Richard Sheets as well.

in objects and procedures that reflect back his own philosophy, his own self-image. As an artist/author he is thus incapable of producing work, since all such work must be a reflection of an 'identity' that doesn't exist, is false or pseudonymous. Levin, we note, fails to write anything except for the brief, derivative, inaccurate, and halting narrative of Packer's murder, but we do note the presence of certain 'art-works' (installations) in his apartment. The exercise bike (149), the large iron writing desk (149), and the port-a-loo (190), are all objects Levin identifies with; all are versions of other objects they crudely mimic; all are evocative of what we might consider a poetic of futility, of inutility, and obsolescence. We note also the somatic intensity with which Levin reacts to money; for Levin, the representational and allegorical qualities of exchange value are something to embrace and incorporate, as seems apparent in his wish to rub Packer's money on his face (58), and in his licking the "milling" of coins (154). Levin gets a sense of who he is, of being a person, through such interactions with mimetic systems, and this explains his relationship with the ATM machine – tracking his money through the system of bank branches (149) for the "psychology" (60) of the experience, and for the sense, perhaps, of personal continuity in time and space such a system might provide. What Levin reports as the "charisma" (60) of the ATM machine is attributable to the mediation the machine affords Levin on his mimetic *weltanschauung*, where words and propositions, like the instructions issued by the money machine, are either correct or incorrect, true or false. Levin's *Tractatus*-like philosophy of allegory is enshrined in a machine that asks, "is this correct" and that "teaches us to think in logic blocks" (150). This idea that propositions are either true or false explains Levin's helplessness to allegory, and to a version of allegory devoid of irony, play, iterative possibility and Otherness. It also explains his failure as an artist and author.

Part Three: Tenderness of Tenderness.

(i) Introduction

For DeLillo, the unavoidable outcome of such an addiction to tenderless allegory – this compulsion apparent in both Packer and Levin to mimeticism – is, as is shown in *Cosmopolis*, violence. We are tempted, I think, to feel for the pathetic Levin something like sympathy, even though, against this, we must also reckon with his

desire to kill “all those people sitting in their little chairs and drinking at those tables on the terrace after work” (201). Packer too, perhaps because of the doubts he is beginning to experience, if not also for his capacity to recognise and respect scenes of fragility and tenderness, arouses in the reader moments of affinity and empathy, but he, too, commits murder.¹⁸⁷ Like Levin, the execution of this act originates in Packer’s servitude to irony-less allegory. The “aesthetics of interaction” Packer searches for in fact culminates in his shooting of Torval, and with this the experience of the conjunction of word (in this case, the gun’s name-code: “Nancy Babich”) with experience (the shooting itself). The shooting signifies the sort of power of allegory Packer searches for so as to re-calibrate the word-world relation; it signifies also both Packer’s and Levin’s more general desires to “stop the world” (5, 55) and its endless signifying; and as Levin himself says of assassination and murder (and here he is once again ventriloquising Packer) “[t]his is the vision of the new day [...] it is the violent act that makes history and changes everything that came before” (154).

The idea of this “new day”, with its messianic overtones, appeals to Levin as the promise of the return to the authority of the word and its dominion over the Other and the world. In a sense, Levin wishes a reversal of the “zero-oneness” (24) of the world back to a state of prelapsarian unity. The dreamed-of moment of revelatory violence – encapsulated in Levin’s assassination attempt, that is itself fused for Levin to the

¹⁸⁷ Indeed, as the text suggests, Packer is probably responsible for the deaths of many others. Reconsidering his murder of Torval we find Packer thinking of “his chief of security flat on the asphalt, a second yet left in his life. He thought of others down the years, hazy and nameless. He felt an enormous remorseful awareness. It moved through him, called guilt [...]” (196). Moreover, the constellation of body, pain, Other, and memory (here related to cancer) all connect to trigger for Packer his awareness of “tenderness” when, in the middle of his prostate exam, he notices something, a mood, a sympathy pass between himself and Jane Melman:

Something passed between them, deeply, a sympathy beyond the standard meanings that also encompassed these meanings, pity, affinity, tenderness, the whole physiology of neural maneuver, of heartbeat and secretion, some vast sexus of arousal drawing him toward her, complicatedly, with Ingram’s finger up his ass. [...]

He felt these things. He felt the pain. It travelled up the pathways. It informed the ganglion and spinal cord. He was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory even when he was shaping it under the measured effect of barbells and weights. It was convertible to wave arrays of information. It was the thing he watched on the oval screen when he wasn’t watching Jane. (48)

The notions of connection and, as the text soon makes clear, penetration Packer’s feeling of tenderness is based on is, however, undermined when we realise that it is Packer himself who is being penetrated by the finger of his proctologist. The connection attested to here by Packer is thus reduced to a feedback loop in which Jane is largely irrelevant; Packer is, in effect, both seducing and satisfying himself.

notion of his impossible book, revealed also in Packer's self-destructive gambit on the Yen and his drive towards his own death – is designed to “stop the world” and enable some transcendence of it at the same time. Such acts of eschatological wish-fulfilment are waged against pain, memory, time and Otherness, but a problem and question remain, as Levin puts it, “how to imagine the moment” (154). The death of the imagination has still to be imagined, it seems, but, without the necessary understanding of irony (in allegory) and limited to the confines of his mimeticism, Levin is left “helpless” in light of the sort of *Tractatus*-like cage of language where one cannot speak of what one cannot know. At the end of his narrative we find Packer, also, stranded in helplessness as he waits for his death, reported to him moments earlier via the camera in his watch that has recorded it. Packer is left, stranded in the present tense, waiting for the world to catch up with his knowledge of it relayed to him via his techno-allegorical translation of it. But it is his faith in the mimeticism of allegory that creates his passivity, his credulity to simulation that makes him powerless and, as I will show, it is his failure to incorporate the tenderness of allegory (allegory as ruin of irony) that defines his helplessness.

In what amounts to an examination of power in the postmodern, DeLillo contrasts the sort of language philosophy represented by his two extremists (Packer and Levin) against Otherness and tenderness, most notably associated here by DeLillo with New York itself and its diverse, memoried, and Other denizens who live beneath, but also as the immanence, within which the capitalist symbolic asserts its all-pervasive, metastasizing and dominant conceit. In contrast to the two previous novels, Otherness is rejected by the protagonist, tenderness and irony do not last for Packer, and memory is shown to be an irritant to him, easily dismissed, repressed and cast aside. For this reason, there is a definite pessimism implied in DeLillo's portrait of Capitalist America, and the ease with which such considerations, as the ethical and the work of art, are misrecognised. Despite DeLillo's critique of the culture as embodied in Packer, and despite his critique of a sort of un-ironic poststructuralism personified by Packer (evident in his philosophy of language and his colloquy of theorists), DeLillo's depiction of Packer's rejection of Otherness is damning. But, as I have suggested, this rejection serves DeLillo well in his presentation of irony and tenderness as both ironic and tender – that is to say, not reducible to presentation as content. Thus, DeLillo evokes irony and tenderness ironically; both terms become the unsaid and unwritten

underworld of the text, the ‘tender’ meaning of a text that says something different to what it appears to say.

(ii) On Film

In the Twentieth and Twenty-first century we are more ‘on film’ than ever before, and perhaps this explains something of the importance of film in DeLillo’s texts; we live our lives on film and act as actors, and our consciousness of the world and our *selves* is mediated by the vision of the camera, the affectation of the actor. Living in a culture so mediated by this translation of ‘reality’, performing our on-film-ness, *can* become an ironic method of declaring the tenderness, if also the “synthetic” qualities, of our being allegorical. Our ironising of film-reality is thus an analogy for an awareness of our being-in-language, which is really the underlying experience of all mediation. Film bares us to the question of allegory, translation, etc., that texts, irony, and philosophers such as Derrida have been drawing our attention to for years. For this reason, the film scene DeLillo places in *Cosmopolis* can be seen to afford the reader (as well as Packer) the possibility of this connection between tenderness and allegory. Indeed, in this scene we get a view of allegory (as tendered by irony) to contrast against the mimetic allegory that dominates DeLillo’s depiction of the postmodern.

The point DeLillo appears to be making with this scene is that a vision of tender allegory can be found in the apprehension of “America” acting its allegories, can be found when we are able to perceive the ironic underworld of all allegory, of all symbolic economies. Packer’s revelation of Otherness and tenderness (fleeting and ultimately misapplied as it is) comes with his revelation of allegory, specifically with his discovery of a scene depicting an allegory caught in the process of its assembly (the film set). However, in a seemingly metatextual move, one that mortifies the novel’s own relation to representation, DeLillo appears to suggest that the film crew are in fact working on the film that Packer mistakes as his own experience and consciousness of the world, as his life. In a sense, this would appear to confirm Packer’s narcissistic sense of himself, but it also suggests that all narcissisms are the product of a cast of thousands, all produced by one’s being an Other among others.

The sense of Packer's discovery of his life as a movie is conveyed through the suddenness and arbitrariness with which the set is revealed. Just as Packer is considering that "something had to happen soon [...]" (171), the film set suddenly appears:

[t]hen lights came on, dead ahead, flaring with a crack and whoosh, great carbon-arc floodlights that were set on tripods and rigged to lampposts. A woman in jeans appeared, flagging down the car. The intersection was soaked in vibrant light, the night abruptly alive. (172)

Despite all the systems of surveillance at Packer's disposal in the limousine – the "micro cameras that monitored the perimeter of the automobile" (171), the "night-vision display" (170) he enables – it is

only now that Eric [sees] the heavy trolley with movable boom attached, rolling slowly into place. Installed at the high end of the boom was a platform that held a movie camera and a couple of seated men.

The crane wasn't the only thing he had missed. When he got out of the car and moved to a spot that wasn't blocked by the lunch truck, he saw the elements of the scene in preparation. (172)

It is as though Packer has stumbled across the invention of allegory, the real, before it is ready, as though he has discovered the workings of the novel, and with this, the unpicking of his conceit, his narcissistic and allegorical construction of the world. In a sense, this scene evokes what we can think of as the return of repressed Otherness; this cast of hundreds is a sample of the nameless others that comprise the forgotten underworld of Packer's empire, a metaphor for repressed memory. The scene is paradigmatic of DeLillo's articulation of Otherness through irony, in this case, through the ironising of Packer's reality by the metaphorical exposure of the constructedness of reality – the cameras, lights, booms and crew are all metaphors for the revelation of allegoricity. This revelation, a kind of mortifying vision of Packer's governing assumptions, is associated with those contexts of Otherness as I have previously described them: bodies, the street, and the naked vulnerability of tenderness.

There were three hundred naked people sprawled in the street. They filled the intersection, lying in haphazard positions, some bodies draped over others, some levelled, flattened, fetal, with children among them. No one was moving, no one's eyes were open. They were a sight to come upon, a city of stunned flesh, the bareness, the bright lights, so many bodies unprotected and hard to credit in a place of ordinary human transit.

Of course there was a context. Someone was making a movie. But this was just a frame of reference. The bodies were blunt facts, naked in the street. Their power was their own, independent of whatever circumstance attended the event. But it was a curious power, he thought, because there was something shy and wan in the scene, a little withdrawn. A woman coughed with a head-jerk and a leap of the knee. He did not wonder whether they were meant to be dead or only senseless. He found them sad and daring both, and more naked than ever in their lives. (172)

What we find here are the beginnings of a ‘definition’ of tenderness that the pages concerned with this scene elaborate on. Most immediately, this passage signals tenderness in its recording of bare human flesh on the surface of the street;¹⁸⁸ moreover, the very nakedness of the extras represents tenderness as vulnerability and exposure – “stunned flesh”, “unprotected”, “withdrawn” and bare. And we find cues to the tenderness of allegory here, allegory substituted by bodies (as is DeLillo’s theme in the novel, much in the manner of Benjamin) where there is not so much the content of a meaningful context with which to reckon such “bareness”, but a nakedness of content, only a “frame of reference” but also something else, something “withdrawn” in the manner of irony, and independent of such reference. Where, in the text, Packer has earlier sought for some intersecting point of word and world, here he finds what, but for a conception of tenderness, he might have expected: “a border of fallen bodies” (174) – not merely “fallen” allegory, but also the fallen bodies of all those “others” made victims by his pursuit of power.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ A sense heightened by Packer’s reportage of the “textual variation of slubs of chewing gum” (174) he feels against the skin of his back as he lies in the street with the others.

¹⁸⁹ The tenderness of such fallen bodies is apparent also in DeLillo’s presentation of “THE LAST TECHNO RAVE”. Ostensibly the rave is an occasion for the dissemination of the pain killing drug “novo” (126), and the way it spreads throughout the location is to be seen as suggestive of capitalism itself (and capitalism’s own attempted mastery or false mourning of fear, pain), like the commodity-symbolic, in fact, that draws you in: “you caught what they had. First you were apart and watching and then you were in, and with, and of the crowd, and then you were the crowd, densely assembled and dancing as one” (126). The dancers themselves are described as moving in a “Cyclonic twirl”, a spreading mass of people moving through a theatre “stripped of seating, paint and history” (124). The twirl of the dancers is also the whirl characteristic of Packer’s false mourning, his desire to escape the body and its pain and to ascend to some fleshless, technological afterlife; not surprisingly, then, the music here is that which “took you over, replacing your skin and brain with digital tissue” (126). The result is a populace turned into a “blank crowd, outside worry and pain, drawn to the glassy repetition” of music described as “loud, bland, bloodless, and controlled” (127). The self is dissipated, the ravers “melt [...] into each other so they wouldn’t shrivel up as individuals” (127). However, Packer sees the other side of the rave – its underside, as I have suggested – when he views the slumped mass of ravers beneath the event:

Sitting and lying everywhere, slumped against each other. [...] They could not speak or walk. One of them licked another’s face, the only movement in the room. Even as his self-awareness grew weaker, he could see who they were in their chemical delirium and it was tender and moving, to know them in their frailty, their wistfulness of being, because kids is all they were, trying not to scatter in the air”. (127)

Even within capitalism, perhaps more accurately, beneath capitalism, something “tender” persists (and this is a tenderness tied to the material (bodies, objects, the street), as DeLillo’s texts make clear), though this sense is heightened here by the sense of an ending supplied in the title “the last techno rave”. Tenderness, therefore, DeLillo seems to want us to consider, manifests on the cusp of anachronism, requiring a sense of history as alive, as an ongoing dialectic of possibilities, one of which is the passing of allegory into the memorial time of *différance*.

The elaboration of tenderness and Otherness in *Cosmopolis* is contingent on the materiality of the body. In the description that follows, so engrossed as it is in its recording of this human materiality, we note the poignancy of Packer's obvious enthrallment to Otherness, when confronted by the sight of so much vulnerable flesh. And although it is Packer's wish to "convert" the body into data, to transcend his own fleshly state for a realm of pure information, for a fleeting moment, within the context of this "scene" – its makeshift, contingent, and highly constructed qualities – and its chance-like discovery, he wishes to be "one of them":

It tore his mind apart, trying to see them here and real, independent of the image on a screen in Oslo or Caracas. Or were those places indistinguishable from this one? But why ask these questions? Why see these things? They isolated him. They set him apart and this is not what he wanted. He wanted to be here among them, all-body, the tattooed, the hairy-assed, those who stank. He wanted to set himself in the middle of the intersection, among the old with their raised veins and body blotches and next to the dwarf with a bump on his head. He thought there were probably people here with wasting diseases, a few, undissuadable, skin flaking away. There were the young and strong. He was one of them. He was one of the morbidly obese, the tanned and fit middle-aged. He thought of the children in the scrupulous beauty of their pretending, so formal and fine boned. He was one. There were those with heads nested in the bodies of others, in breasts or armpits, for whatever sour allowance of shelter. He thought of those who lay faceup and wide-winged, open to the sky, genitals world-centered. There was a dark woman with a small red mark in the middle of her forehead, for auspiciousness. Was there a man with a missing limb, brave stump knotted below the knee? How many bodies bearing surgical scars? And who is the girl in dreadlocks, folded into herself, nearly all of her lost in her hair, pink toes showing?

He wanted to look around but did not open his eyes until a long moment passed and a man's soft voice called, 'Cut'. (176)¹⁹⁰

The distinction Packer makes, and with which this passage begins, between the "here", the "real", and its mediated representation "on a screen in Oslo" positions once again irony and Otherness – the "cut" or pain that separates word and world – as the subject or propositional context of the passage. The tenderness of this proposition is there to be seen in the exposed bodies gathered at the "intersection" of world and representation as allegory denuded of its mimetic surface, mortified in this regard, in a scene that is about the composition of representation. And although he wishes to be "one of them", he cannot tear himself away from his recording of the scene, the visual taxonomy of all he sees. He needs to master this tenderness with questions ("how many bodies bearing surgical scars") and convert it into information.

In the street, among the bodies, Packer finds himself within the pain of the world, the intersection (literally, a street intersection) of allegory and Otherness that I have

¹⁹⁰ The film set scene – in the very exposure of its construction – is yet another of DeLillo's validated events or 'artworks', validated precisely because its representation is part of its depiction of representation; because its mode of reproduction is what is reproduced in the scene of its representation.

referred to as a site of irony and possible tenderness. But more than the nakedness on display here, the vulnerability and exposure of these bodies “nested” in each other, seeking some “allowance of shelter” or “wide winged, open [...] world-centered”, this tenderness is also to be seen as inseparable from the notes of affectation (performance, ‘acting’) we find here: “children in the scrupulous beauty of their pretending”, a woman’s “red mark in the middle of her forehead, for auspiciousness”. Despite his wish to be “all body”, and what seems to be his recognition that in being “one of them” he is himself an Other (a pre-condition for the apprehension of tenderness), Packer fails to lose himself in the tender ironies of “pretending” that he finds himself within on the film set, within this allegory *of* pretending. As an expression or encounter with the conditions of one’s own Otherness, this ought to be enough to introduce tenderness into Packer’s narcissism and disrupt his language of consumption. But what we see instead is, in fact, Packer’s recourse to a hyper-mediated (filmic) language – one of romance, possession, and wish fulfilment.

Thus, the long awaited coupling with Elise that Packer desires becomes completely drenched in overwrought, clichéd, and cinematic language that serves to insert distance and falseness into their “act” of love.¹⁹¹ The “two lovers in isolation, free of memory and time” (177) conduct their exchange, entirely without self-consciousness, in a filmic language that, for example, turns Elise’s laugh into a “cigarette laugh out of an old black-and-white movie” (177), and Packer thinks to himself that his encounter with Elise resembled “the next scene in the black-and-white film that was being screened in theatres worldwide” (177). The note of narcissism apparent in the conceited nature of this last remark finds its counterpart in the sense of possession Packer evinces in the moment of sexual climax where he says Elise’s name and “finally kn[ows] her” (178). Packer’s compulsion to knowledge, naming and possession is thus shown to define his relation to allegory and to the Otherness (here, figured as Elise) he seeks to repress by his relation to the dead allegorical language of clichéd film. Such is the power of Packer’s need to mediate memory and Otherness – and the pain this brings – that the rest of the text in which Packer dives headlong into

¹⁹¹ The dialogue exchanged between the two redefines the sort of glib language of romance so tirelessly rehearsed in Hollywood films. When Packer informs Elise that he has lost her entire fortune Elise, from within their intertwined bodies, replies with a laugh: “I lose things all the time [...] I lost my car this morning [...] what do poets know about money? Love the world and trace it in a line of verse. Nothing but this [...] and this’. Here she put a hand to his head and took him, seized him by the hair [...] drawing his head back and bending to kiss him [...]” (177).

his past, the death of this father, his relationship to his mother, and his meeting with his would-be assassin, comes to resemble a movie-mediated version.

In a sense, Packer internalises the film camera's gaze, as it seems he must in order to orient himself, in order that he not be overwhelmed by the fall into memory and Otherness his encounter with Levin and death now promise: "He prepared to fire, eyes closed, visualizing his finger on the trigger, in tight detail, and also seeing the man in the street, himself, long-lensed, facing the dead tenement" (181). Thus, immediately prior to the first exchanges with Levin, Packer experiences once again, and at another (street) intersection in the novel, a moment of disorientation, what I refer to as an experience of irony and the fall:

He stood in the street. There was nothing to do. He hadn't realised this could happen to him. The moment was empty of urgency and purpose. He hadn't planned on this. Where was the life he'd always led? There was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting. How could he take a step in any direction if all directions were the same? (180)

Packer is more naked here than he was on the film set; he is stripped of the props and allegories – the computers, cameras, the analysis and the information – of his empire, and without his technologies of mediation and conversion he loses his sense of direction and purpose. In the street (the site of the Other) Packer experiences an 'original' moment: a moment denuded of design, made naked, resembling nothing so much as a delay and a deferral – an emptiness of time and space momentarily "independent of [...] circumstance" (172). Packer finds himself thus in the moment of the fall, confronted by an Otherness that underwrites allegory (such as "direction") even as it makes a point about the fallen nature of such allegories, their contingency, their tenderness: all directions are the same. We note Daedalus, rendered here by DeLillo as a bicycle courier, "bare-chested [...] swanning past, arms spread wide [...] making] a sweeping turn" (181) past the fallen Packer.

Any chance that this experience of epistemological and ontological tenderness might prove truly enduring or epiphanic for Packer is quashed, however, when his assassin, Levin, ironically enough, 'saves' Packer from this (original, void-like) moment, calling out his name in what Packer recognises to be "trochaic beats" (181). Levin has begun shooting at Packer, but, nevertheless, for Packer to hear his name returned back to him from his momentary encounter with the semiotic void (and aestheticised too, we note) is enough for him to resume his movie-mediated reality. But the movie allegory doesn't work as well for Packer as it did before; rather, as mediating medium, it is tainted by self-consciousness and, more importantly, Packer's

memories of attending movies with his mother after the death of his father. Where the film allegory once acted as a buffer to pain, Otherness and memory, it now acts as a gateway for the overwhelming return of repressed pain and memory that erupt from the re-opened wound of Packer's representational consciousness.

Packer is powerless to control the details of the memories that arise as they swirl and conflate; and the text mirrors this, as for once the surface of Packer's character and language is punctured and we (the reader) are made privy to an extended passage of disorderly interior monologue. Packer's underworld unconsciousness appears to erupt here in a confusing constellation of nouns and pro-nouns (including references to Packer's parents, as well as Torval and Nancy Babich) and references to infidelity, and betrayal, love, sex and death, all of which circulate in an atmosphere of pain, loss and violence. This pain, for Packer, as always it seems with DeLillo, is located once again between experience (the father's death) and representation (the mother's movies where she takes the young Packer to assuage their loss) where allegory – the seamless version of which Packer has dedicated his life to – is ruined, shown to be a ruin. Such an awareness of allegory, coming as it does for Packer after the experience of the film set and his Icarean experience of the intersection, manifests here in the self-consciousness with which he finds himself, during his pursuit of Levin, outside a door, standing “ramrod straight” (183) with a gun in his hand in classic movie pose. A sense of Otherness comes to him through the very rehearsed and performed nature of this pose. The ensuing ‘dialogue’, conducted with his pistol, with its effects of self-consciousness (“I know I’m talking to a gun that can’t respond” (185)) makes possible a kind of circuit-break within Packer's narcissism, and it is memory (Otherness) that rushes into the wound or “cut” created here.

We [Packer and his mother] went to the movies because we were trying to learn how to be alone together. We were cold and lost and my father's soul was trying to find us, to settle itself in our bodies, not that I want or need your sympathy. I can picture her in the heat of sex, expressionless, because this is a Nancy Babich thing she does, blank-face. I say her name but not his. I used to be able to say his name but now I can't because I know what went on between them. I'm thinking is his picture in a frame on her dresser. How many times do two people have to fuck before one of them deserves to die? I'm standing here enraged in my head. In other words how many times do I have to kill him? These mothers who accept the fiction of kicking in a door. What is a door? It's a movable structure, usually swinging on hinges, which closes off an entranceway and requires a tremendous and prolonged pounding before it can finally be forced open. (185)

The presentation of Otherness, here, is consistent with the sort of constellated elements I have been associating throughout this thesis, namely, memory, loss, the body, a certain level of self-awareness, and the presence of the ruin – the archaic

pistol Packer holds a conversation with. The development throughout the novel of Packer's sense of doubt is here represented by his immersion in the irony or pain he has spent his life repressing and controlling; the slippage, evident here in the conflation of identity, is an effect of his inability to tender and relate between irony and allegory – a negotiation or relationship suggested by the prominence of the 'door' motif developed here. The issue at stake here is not merely allegory, but, as I've been saying, allegorical credulity: the whole "fiction of kicking in a door". The acceptance of this movie-based allegory or narrative element is associated with a sort of escapism from the reality of the father's death, and there is a sense here, attributable to Packer's consciousness, that such an avoidance – through allegory, the acceptance of a "fiction" – is, in its failure to mourn death, tantamount to killing the father once again. The conflation of Torval with Packer's father in this passage suggests the association of the father's death with the name-saying act (the allegorical act represented in the gun's firing code) that presages Packer's murder of Torval. By continuing with his life of allegory, Packer is "killing him" (185) (Torval/father) over and over again, and this appears to be a sort of hard-won tender awareness of the sort of false mourning that has characterised his life – we see it also in his refusal of his body, his desire to transcend into some fleshless immortality, and thus avoid mourning and memory, when we are told by Packer that his dead father's "soul" was trying to "settle itself in our bodies". But, of course, up to this point Packer's mode of (false) mourning has taken the form of a mastery of allegory and we find suggestive reasons for this in his disgust at the feminine figure in this rant (mother/Babich) who, perceived as passive and detached, is guilty of too willingly accepting the false reality of another.¹⁹²

(iii) Untranslatable, Untransferable pain.

At the end of the last section we found Packer considering the pain of loss and the relationship of such experiences of loss to the possibility of their representation in allegory (and indeed, the whole question of mourning and irony framed by the

¹⁹² Packer's will to power, a response, I'm suggesting, to his mother's acceptance of the lies of the father (pertaining to infidelity – either an extra-marital affair, or the withholding of the truth about his cancer (see 161)), is a response to the feeling that she too easily lived within the allegorical reality of another, and that this made her a victim (vulnerable) of the father and of the unknown, making her dependent and tender, prompting Packer's drive to become a powerhouse of media and representation.

demand to represent the absent and Other). Packer's growing doubts about the dominion of his empire of capitalist allegory places him in the dilemma of mourning (discussed in previous chapters) that *Cosmopolis* concludes with. In a sense, Packer is brought by DeLillo to the threshold of irony, brought, through the experience of pain – both body pain and the pain of allegorical non-coincidence, but also the pain of memory – to the question of translation: Packer's two options consist, firstly, of embracing Otherness as the necessary condition of all allegory, and, with this, accepting the world of the fallen and tender subject, or, secondly, dismissing such tenderness for the pursuit of power, an avoidance of Otherness, pain and mourning, through a dreamed-of transcendence to a sublime state of fleshless immortality. As Packer see it, one either accepts the necessarily incomplete, mortified or ruined nature of translation, or one believes in the power of allegory and technology to convert all experience into data and knowledge.

So Packer is left with a decision to make, and by the authorial conceit apparent in the construction of such a 'decision', DeLillo is able, once again, to lay out the distinction he appears constantly to make in his fiction between the fallen and tender conditions of human and ethical subjectivity – the possibility of art – and ideologies of bad faith, misprision and commodification – the possibility of power and dominance encapsulated in DeLillo's representations of capitalism. And, again, the context for this distinction-making is pain, specifically, the pain Packer inflicts on himself during his showdown with Levin when he shoots himself in the hand. For Packer, such is the pain in his hand that he begins to recognise how pain is also something like a philosophical category, as he says:

The pain was the world. The mind could not find a place outside it. He could hear the pain, staticky, in his hand and wrist. He closed his eyes again, briefly. He could feel himself contained in the dark but also just beyond it, on the lighted outer surface, the other side, belonged to both, feeling both, being himself and seeing himself. (201)

And, of course, as DeLillo has been showing us throughout his *oeuvre*, pain, as philosophy of Otherness, is adequate to the subject's good-faith experience of the world, of being-in-the-world. Moreover, pain presents the sort of proposition I have been isolating in irony: a notion pertaining to the threshold of self in its relationship with Otherness, where the 'self' "belong[s] to both". Companionable to this experience of pain, and its tendering of the self as Other, is the understanding that language is mortified by an Otherness it both originates in and contains the traces of. The tender act in which Levin applies a "cold compress" to Packer's wounded hand

becomes a further occasion for the exposure of the tenderness of language. As Packer considers: “It wasn’t a compress and it wasn’t cold but they agreed unspokenly to use this term for whatever palliative effect it might have” (197). In this case, DeLillo highlights the something that is missing between the term and what it refers to, but to the purpose of emphasising how “palliative” language can be despite the fact that it misses what it describes. Language is what we have with which to tender the pain of our fallen state, and it does this most faithfully, most successfully, when language itself is shown to be tender, vulnerable and incomplete.

Moved by the idea of allegorical tenderness, Packer considers his wife, Elise, and the allegorical myth of her “beauty”.¹⁹³ Elise, as Packer recognises, is, perhaps, not beautiful at all, but “beautiful” is what she ‘is’ by virtue of her being “young” and rich, an heiress to a fortune. And though she is not beautiful, Packer entertains his wish to lie, anyway, and tell her she is (205). In this moment, he forsakes allegorical coincidence for the beauty of a tender lie, at once a recognition of the artificial, constructed nature of this particular allegory of beauty, but, also, a use of this allegory in full knowledge of its conceptual tenderness. An allegory about beauty thus becomes in DeLillo’s text an allegory about the beautiful and ruined nature of fallen allegory.

But such a tender vision of allegory relies, as I have insisted, on the understanding of its relationship to pain – what I have called its ‘ruined’ nature, its composition within irony. The sort of *phrōnesis* all this culminates in is the untranslatability of Otherness and pain. What is more, this pain, as Packer momentarily recognises, defines the self even as, in the same moment, it marks the self as Other:

[...] his pain interfered with his immortality. It was too crucial to his distinctness, too vital to be bypassed and not susceptible, he didn’t think, to computer emulation. The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions and trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. So much come and gone, this is who he was, the lost taste of milk licked from his mother’s breast, the stuff he sneezes when he sneezes, this is him, and how a person becomes the reflection he sees in a dusty window when he walks by. He’d come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain.

¹⁹³ Elise’s beauty is an example of an allegory cut off from the world that provokes allegory; the relationship between Packer and Elise is no more than a marriage of allegories and her beauty is the term required to finish the allegorical set:

[h]e began to understand that they’d invented her beauty together, conspiring to assemble a fiction that worked to their mutual maneuverability and delight. They’d married in the shroud of this unspoken accord. They needed the final term in the series. She was rich, he was rich; she was heir-apparent, he was self-made; she was cultured, he was ruthless; she was brittle, he was strong; she was gifted, he was brilliant; she was beautiful. This was the core of their understanding, the thing they needed to believe before they could be a couple. (72)

He felt so tired now. His hard-gotten grip on the world, material things, great things, his memories true and false, the vague malaise of winter twilights, untransferable, the pale nights when his identity flattens for lack of sleep, the small wart he feels on his thigh every time he showers, all him, and how the soap he uses, the smell and feel of the concave bar makes him who he is because he names the fragrance, amandine, and the hang of his cock, untransferable, and his strangely achy knee, the click in his knee when he bends it, all him, and so much else that's not convertible to some high sublime, the technology of mind-without-end. (207)

On the verge of such a revelation of pain it seems likely that Packer will abandon his longed for conversion (translation) into the immortality of transcendental data, and notably, the reflected image that appears before Packer here (as his self-image) is not the perfect illusion of the bright reflective surfaces of Packer's skyscraper or sunglasses, but the imperfect or flawed reflection of a dusty window.¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, allegory, what Packer here refers to as his "hard-gotten grip on the world", is seen to have lost something of its gloss, all the "things" (allegories) Packer has known now reflecting back a sense of their Otherness, their "untransferable" nature. And this sense of allegory, as articulation of both knowing and Otherness (as irony), comes to Packer (in possibly the novel's most significant sentence) as he realises that "he'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain". This is, then, a "knowledge" that can't be translated or converted to some "high sublime" (208); this is an 'Other-knowledge' that is 'knowable' only through pain. Moreover, this passage through pain to 'knowledge' is itself "unknowable". But Packer's sense of his distinctness, his difference, both of which the material world of the body (the "wart on his thigh", the "hang of his cock") teach him about, is inseparable from the untranslatable nature of Otherness.

As model capitalist, Packer has an insight into the construction of self that reflects DeLillo's insight into the construction of capitalism, which, in the manner of the ego, is composed (as an allegory) within an Otherness that exists at the level of a material world that capitalism nevertheless blinds itself to via the naturalisation of its ways of seeing, its modes of production and representation. Thus, Packer, as we find him above, filled with his revelations of untranslatability, the ruined nature of knowing and representation, is poised on the very edge of his capitalist conceit, positioned at a tender threshold, an intersection, if you like, between two alternatives. The first, we might consider, is that encapsulated in the image of the beetle Packer later watches,

¹⁹⁴ This imperfect reflection recalls the mirror in the barbershop of Anthony Aduato where Eric goes for his half-haircut; the mirror there "needs silvering" we are told, and in that scene, as in the detail of the one above, the ruined nature of the mirror reflects on the partial, idiosyncratic and ruined nature (the 'broken English' of Anthony) of allegory and language in regard to memory.

making its way down a length of cord. The second alternative, seen through the camera function of his wristwatch, is a vision of his future – his death – and the promise of transcendence:

He moved his arm, straightening and flexing, pointing the watch six different ways, but the body of a man, in long shot, remained on-screen. He looked up at the beetle moving in its specialized slowness down along the warps and seams of the wire, its old dumb leaf eating arcadian pace, thinking it is in a tree, and he redirected the camera at the insect. But the prone body stayed on-screen. (205)

The image of the beetle that initially appears in real time on the watch is replaced by the future vision of Packer's death, and while the beetle continues to make its slow progress down the cord (in real time), Eric keeps an eye on 'his' dead body that, as presented to him through the watch, makes its way to the morgue. The beetle continues in its delusion¹⁹⁵ ("thinking it is in a tree"), and in the present of its reality long after its image has been lost on the technology of the watch, and this is the point: the beetle persists beyond its mediated reality even though Packer seems unable to escape his mediated destiny. The watch can only present a version of the future. The future, we might say, is *only* possible, it never *is*. Whenever it is conceived as such, the future can only be an allegory signed in the name of (in the noun-phrase) *the future*. When Packer appears to experience the future before it is due he is in fact only experiencing an allegory of the future proposed by his media. It is not that his media are able to translate and pre-empt the future, but that media, in effect, create the future; the effect is a consequence not of prediction but of Packer's slavishness to allegory – his credulity to representation as strictly mimetic. The future is an allegory (of the future), but allegory has become invisible; this is the achievement of the capitalist symbolic – the making-transparent its force of aestheticisation, and with this the seamless conjoining of allegory, technology, and temporality.

As I've suggested, such passages represent Packer on the verge of tenderness; they represent a tender-world view that, as I have hoped to show throughout my reading of his texts, DeLillo appears to endorse. And yet this tenderness is rejected by his protagonist as Packer's wish for posthumous immortality and influence proves too powerful:

¹⁹⁵The switching between camera shot of an unidentified man and the beetle suggests a comparison is intended, and there is an irony here in the image of the beetle and the naïveté or unknowing it evokes, "thinking it is in a tree". Yet Packer's own ontological and temporal status is unsure according to the "metaphysic[s]" of his watch. The arcane and "arcadian" delusion of the beetle is meant to be read as an evocation of the creaturely and fallen nature of the human.

He'd always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void. (206)

Despite his experiences of tenderness, his wish for a life with Elise in the knowledge of their fallenness in language, allegory and time, and against the prospect of treating the as-yet undecided Levin¹⁹⁶ with tenderness and thus avoiding his own death, Packer chooses a death conceived of as a sublime spectacle; he chooses what he sees through the lens of “the old biochemistry of the ego, the saturated self” (208), a life of posthumous immortality. As we see, Packer imagines his death – couched in narcissistic fashion, preoccupied with surfaces, images, and commodities – as a grand capitalist and aesthetic spectacle:

He imagined Kendra Hayes, his bodyguard and lover, washing his viscera in palm wine in a ceremony of embalming. She had the face for it, the bone structure and skin color, the tapered planes. It was a face from a wall painting in some mortuary temple buried in sand for a thousand years, with dog-headed gods in attendance. He thought of his chief of finance and touchless lover, Jane Melman, masturbating quietly in the last row of the funeral chapel, in a dark blue dress with a cinched waist, during the whispery dimness of the vigil. [...] He wanted to be buried in his nuclear bomber. [...] Not buried but cremated, conflagrated, but buried as well. He wanted to be solarized. He wanted the plane flown by remote control with his embalmed body aboard, suit, tie, turban, and the bodies of his dead dogs, his tall Russian wolfhounds, reaching maximum altitude and levelling at supersonic dash speed and then sent plunging into the sand, fireballed one and all, leaving a work of land art, scorched earth art that would interact with the desert and be held in perpetual trust under the auspices of his dealer and executor, Didi Fancher, and longtime lover, for the respectful contemplation of pre-approved groups and enlightened individuals under exempt-status section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. (208)

Unlike the force of death so central to the animating ironies of the art in *Underworld*, in particular Klara's work with the nuclear bombers in the desert that Packer's art is so clearly designed to remind the reader of, death is turned into a commodity spectacle, shot through with desire and the persistence of an ego's wish for control. In truth, Packer's imagined death is nothing less than a mistaking of death for ego perpetuity: the idea of Others' erotic mourning of the deceased suggests that the Other is still tethered to a reality composed completely within the borders of the subject's narcissism; even in death Packer might still control the lives of others, albeit the “pre-approved”, the “enlightened”, and the wealthy.

As if the distinction between Klara's art (its tendering of death, irony and Otherness) and Packer's “land art” isn't clear enough, DeLillo closes the text with an

¹⁹⁶ As a part of the dramatic irony associated with Packer's death we notice how Levin, at times, is unsure about killing Packer (“either I track him down and shoot him or do not...” (149)). Moreover, Levin appears to equivocate on this issue even during his confrontation with Packer. The point is, it seems, if Packer had treated Levin with something like tenderness he might have avoided his death.

image of Packer's helplessness, an irony to help define Packer's real death – his stranding in the present.

His murderer, Richard Sheets, sits facing him. He has lost interest in the man. His hand contains the pain of this life, all of it, emotional and other, and he closes his eyes one more time. This is not the end. He is dead inside the crystal of his watch but still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound. (209)

By showing Packer his future in the present (evoking the continuing present beyond the text's last words) Packer's watch is also, of course, revealing the past – a “future” now made posterior to the present by the fact of its representation. So there is a kind of paradox or irony at work here in the final scene of the text. This temporal irony is pre-empted, of course, by the dramatic irony presented as the foreknowledge of Packer's death; the effect is to point out Packer's anachronistic status in the text, to highlight, in fact, his tenderness despite his dreamed-of futurism. The “end” of the novel leaves Packer stranded in the present, waiting, in fact, in the death that is composed by the novel's refusal of resolution. In effect, Packer waits in the missing part of the text's narrative, the unrecorded absence of what we are given to expect will be the shooting. This is the novel's *painful* moment (the pain in Packer's hand, yes, but also the pain of a text that is here punctured, riven and exposed, to an absence or wounding of its completion) that illustrates how the narrative has been built around a few missing seconds (the fatal shot) that are not recorded. For all of Packer's allegorical and technological mastery of the world, we are left, like Packer, with only a hole – a gap in his ‘knowing’ of the world, the missing of the experience of death that he has been craving for. For Levin this unrecorded moment – in fact, its very untranslatability – completely undermines his writing project, leaving him devastated. Whereas the text, *Cosmopolis*, its entire narrative and all the memory it contains, can be said to be premised on this Other and ironic (missing) moment, Levin, in comparison, without a ‘theory’ of irony, is left in desolation and passivity to wonder: “what is left that's worth the telling” (61).

Conclusion: What is Left That's Worth the Telling?

As DeLillo, with *Cosmopolis*, appears to suggest, the absence of something like doubt in the symbolic economy of late capitalism is what makes it possible for 'us' (the 'elect' of the West) to live in the future, at least, that is, to live in an allegory of the future. The diminishment of doubt, an effect of the false mourning and repression of Otherness and irony, as I've said, correlates directly to the power of an unimpeachable aesthetic wrought by a culture's fusion of technology and capitalism. The product of this fusion is a mode of allegory that has become inseparable from ideology, and is revealed as the medium of connection and simulation by which the culture maintains its hegemonic force; DeLillo's texts, thus, assume a certain Marxian critique: namely, that where allegory has become ideological, a reflex of the superstructure, the result is an aestheticisation of the material, real, and Other that, in manipulating reproduction and representation, effectively 'manufactures' consent, as well as dissent, difference, irony and Otherness. This incorporation (and simulation) of difference and irony within the commodity-symbolic is precisely what DeLillo observes in *Underworld* regarding the treatment of irony, and the false mourning of Otherness. As is evident in that novel, the power that makes America the world's "super-power" (DeLillo's phrase) is the power of aestheticisation, brought about by the fusing of commodity, technology, and language in the form of allegory. The more seamless the aesthetic, the more unquestioned (and untroubled by irony) this allegoricity becomes. In the fusion of ideology and reality, irony ceases to be ironic and allegory ceases being allegorical because Otherness and difference have been excluded from the culture's semiotic economy, omitted from its loop of references.

This diminishment of allegory as properly allegorical, an effect of its sequesterment from irony, is something DeLillo critiques in his texts; as allegory becomes merely an effect of ideology, the ritual repetition of the production of commodity, the culture, as well as its individuals, loses the awareness of itself as Other, as a representing and allegorising culture, and, thus, as accountable for the ways in which it is seen and for the ways in which it sees. The effects of such an etiolation of allegory, as explored throughout DeLillo's novels, manifests primarily as issues of economy, specifically, the symbolic economies by which individuals represent themselves and others, measure time, exercise responsibility, and reproduce

the ideologies and worlds they live in. Because DeLillo's texts focus on such economic considerations, I argue that the greatest demand faced by the reader of a DeLillo text is to tender a reading of the text's (and DeLillo's) philosophy of the economy of language. This is to say that, with his texts, DeLillo performs a critique of various symbolic-economies – public and private – through his investigation and representation of what might well be his own assumptions about language and representation as validated through the symbolic economies of his artist figures.¹⁹⁷ To this end, irony, we might say, is his medium of inquiry, art, his illustration. The point that DeLillo makes in these three novels is that the most faithful economies, the most ethical and artful representations and reproductions are, first and foremost, faithful to Otherness.

Such a broad overview of DeLillo's presiding ethical and aesthetic concerns enables the DeLillo-reader to pose a series of further questions that tend towards more specifically literary and aesthetic considerations, in particular, those, such as I have, throughout this thesis, framed by the notion of the work of art. If, as it is suggested in *Underworld*, "everything connects", whether by paranoid or logocentric allegories, or as the effect of some astonishing and created sublime, what, then, to the possibilities of loss, doubt, uncertainty, or tenderness? How, within such an economy as DeLillo presents it in novels like *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis*, are these experiences preserved for what they are? Within the "feedback loop" of recycling and commodity production what becomes of pain, absence, or resistance? Moreover, in the drive to control and repress waste and difference will irony remain possible within such an economy? If there is no irony, no experiences of loss, pain, waste, death or doubt (the hallmarks of irony and Otherness), and no way of articulating Otherness or memory as anything beyond the circuit of presences, connections, and the coincidences of

¹⁹⁷ For DeLillo, to make distinct the work of art from the commodity, and from the force of commodity-reproduction, means setting the economy of capitalist reproduction against the system it so persuasively mimics, the economy of language. This is something DeLillo does in the three novels I have read: in *The Body Artist* we are presented with the account of an artist's re-tendering of her own philosophies of language, representation, and reproduction; in *Underworld*, we are witness to a constant comparison made between the economies of various individuals and artists with the massive economical functions of capitalism, commodity, ideology and paranoia, while, in *Cosmopolis* the analysis of the commodity-symbolic, and the economic imperatives of technology, power and wealth are fused with theory and allegory to new levels of parodic extrapolation. *The Body Artist*, with its record of an artist's investigation of her symbolic economy, as well as the *work* of irony within the work of art, is, thus, entirely consistent with the analysis DeLillo undertakes throughout *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis*; the three texts belong to the same project.

ideology, then, “what is left that’s worth the telling”? What becomes of art and literature if Otherness and memory have been successfully recycled?

The single answer DeLillo’s texts propose is, of course, that ‘everything’ still remains to be ‘told’, to be remembered. Despite the management and repression of Otherness within the commodity-symbolic, Otherness does persist. Otherness is, precisely “what’s left”, and as DeLillo text’s make clear, it is from this Otherness that the possibilities of language, art, critique, difference and invention are drawn – indeed, it is from “what’s left” that such works of the imagination sufficient to contest the parameters of the aesthetic (and of reality) as prescribed in ideology may arise. Such contestation of ideology is what is introduced in DeLillo’s texts as questions of the ethical that, for DeLillo, are consequent to the treatment of Otherness through irony, and evinced in the work of art; this is a *work*, as I’ve indicated throughout this thesis, that is rehearsed in the *work* of irony – the mourning of Otherness through the mortification of allegory by which language and Otherness are both tendered and respected.

The Body Artist, although the slightest of the three novels discussed, is so clearly important for DeLillo, and important to the other two novels, because it elaborates in such detail on what I’ve been calling the *work* of art; the tendering of Otherness and with this, the economy of language, allegory, subjectivity and temporality, through irony. *The Body Artist* presents a sort of paradigm for the *work* of irony in the work of art that underwrites all three of DeLillo’s novels, and not least, their critique of the aesthetic conditions of ideology. What Lauren’s text represents is, then, an exercise in the evaluation of our tools for representation. In the course of this exercise the reader glimpses something of our allegoricity, the condition of subjectivity, and the tenderness of this condition. The open and faithful exposure of representation to Otherness provides for an ethical evaluation of our symbolic economies, and at the same time a new imagining called on by the demand to represent the unrepresentable, to tender the impossible. Essentially, this is a mourning process, one of recalling from memory all that has been lost and that may now be recalled for the purpose of representation. The exposure to Otherness is always an occasion for a reminder of our being in language, or historicity, our human tenderness, and our need to name. DeLillo’s texts furnish their readers with a non-innocent, ironic estimation of the most tender artful uses of language that can only be, as such, and, ethical, when seen as ‘written’ in Otherness, when through the melancholic’s gaze we understand and value

allegory for its tenderness, for all it misses, all that is lost and, therefore, all that remains to be said, all that remains to be renewed in allegory. The possibility of such renewal is also one of mortification, one of loss, death, and absence, as it is by irony, the ‘trope’ that installs such loss etc. as the ‘law’ of economy (as in *différance*) that allegory may be renovated, and may articulate difference, resistance, and, ‘tenderly,’ Otherness.

Through the lens of irony and mourning we see how our allegories, even those that have become commodities, are the signs of our redemption, as ruins that suggest (in a dialectical manner) the inexhaustibility of memory and Otherness. Moreover, by such irony, we recognise Otherness and its deferral within all symbolic economies as the very principle of their on-going possibility and operation. Thus, as I’ve said, to be faithful to Otherness, world and memory – all of which, as DeLillo has said, “provoke language” – is to be faithful *to* language, to allegory. Only by virtue of such a faith, based on such experiences of loss, absence, death, irony etc., may the subject expose the commodity-symbolic of capitalism for the hegemonic and ideological force it is. Such a faithful subject in a DeLillo text is invariably an artist, but this doesn’t preclude DeLillo from writing about bad artists, faithless artists defined, as Benno Levin is, by their “perviousness” to ideology. For DeLillo, it is by the profanity of allegory that Otherness is faithfully articulated. Which is to say, that it is by irony that we, with our all too human allegories can manage successfully not to say what we mean; the possibility of going aside of intention is, for DeLillo, something to be celebrated as the very possibility of language; allegory, because tender, tenders an Otherness it cannot explain, but that we must continue to ‘not explain’, over and over again. Within the tender underdetermination of allegory we experience something of the immanence of the world (of Otherness, memory and “time itself”), and the possibility of what Derrida refers to as “the maximum of things to be said and thought”.¹⁹⁸ The art that is significant, that is valued by DeLillo, and that, to a large extent, his last three novels argue for and examine, will be that which peels back allegorical history, opening and questioning allegorical equivalences, structural oppositions, connections, totalist-systems, and paranoias. This is why these novels are so sympathetic to the *work* of irony I’ve seen as essential to deconstruction. DeLillo’s

¹⁹⁸ See *Points*. p.144.

texts perform a deconstruction of ideology – uses of representation, allegory, and the aesthetic – to the purpose of the renovation of allegory and the aesthetic.

Indeed, what Derrida has said of deconstruction holds true for DeLillo's texts as well: deconstruction "tempts itself, *tenders* itself, and attempts to keep itself at the point of the exhaustion of meaning"(emphasis added).¹⁹⁹ The maintenance of 'deconstruction' at the "point" of the "exhaustion of meaning" is possible because 'deconstruction' is constantly caught up in that process of 'somersaulting' Benjamin described in his discussion of allegory – the 'somersaulting' I've described as the force of irony within allegory, that enables 'tendering': a process of making tender – as in mortification, criticism, exposure and revelation – counter posed with the resulting tendering of further meanings, readings and theories. Meaning becomes "exhausted", continuously, by virtue of its very mutability, which is to say, its openness to the impossible force allegory mourns – Otherness. However, the exhaustion of meaning is only ever revealed through the act of utter fidelity to the singularity of an event, its specific, contextual, and intense presentation of Otherness. And indeed, one way of contextualising this phrase of Derrida's, the "exhaustion of meaning", is as what DeLillo refers to in his essay, "In the Ruins of the Future", a "singularity". The immediate context for the application of this term is as a quality of experience in response to the destruction of the World Trade Centre Towers. For DeLillo, this event, as with any event in which our relationship to language is made strange and our understanding of the rapport between word and world problematic, serves as a focus for a writer to evaluate what it is that writing might be *about* – indeed, an occasion in which to consider "what's worth the telling". Regarding the events of the eleventh of September DeLillo writes:

In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space. (39)

By such an event, and by much less traumatic or violent irruptions of the world into language, is the writer exposed to the limits of representation. Such an exposure might well provide the writer with an opportunity to evaluate false consciousness, a questioning of the allegorical imperatives within which we live and assume to make the world present and ours, but in this singularity (the concentration of Otherness and memory in a specific event or subject) is carried a truth about the relation of all

¹⁹⁹ See *Positions* (trans. Alan Bass). 1981. p.14.

writing to space and time – what I refer to as the ironic or fallen nature of language, expressed throughout DeLillo’s works as loss, death, pain, and trauma. The ‘event’ (the event in general, even that of a paper clip falling from a desk) presents us with the chance to evaluate the Otherness we live in and are situated by, and asks us about how this Otherness, this “howling space”, or what Lauren in *The Body Artist* describes as the “howling face, the stark, the not-as-if of things” (*TBA*, 90), is mourned and represented. In such a state, for DeLillo it seems, the writer or artist must faithfully ask: with what tenderness do we commit to this Otherness, this condition of memory, in language? To respond, in language, as much as to the demands *of* language itself, is to once again return to the question of irony.

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